

The ADVENTURES OF BILLY TOPSAIL

By

NORMAN DUNCAN

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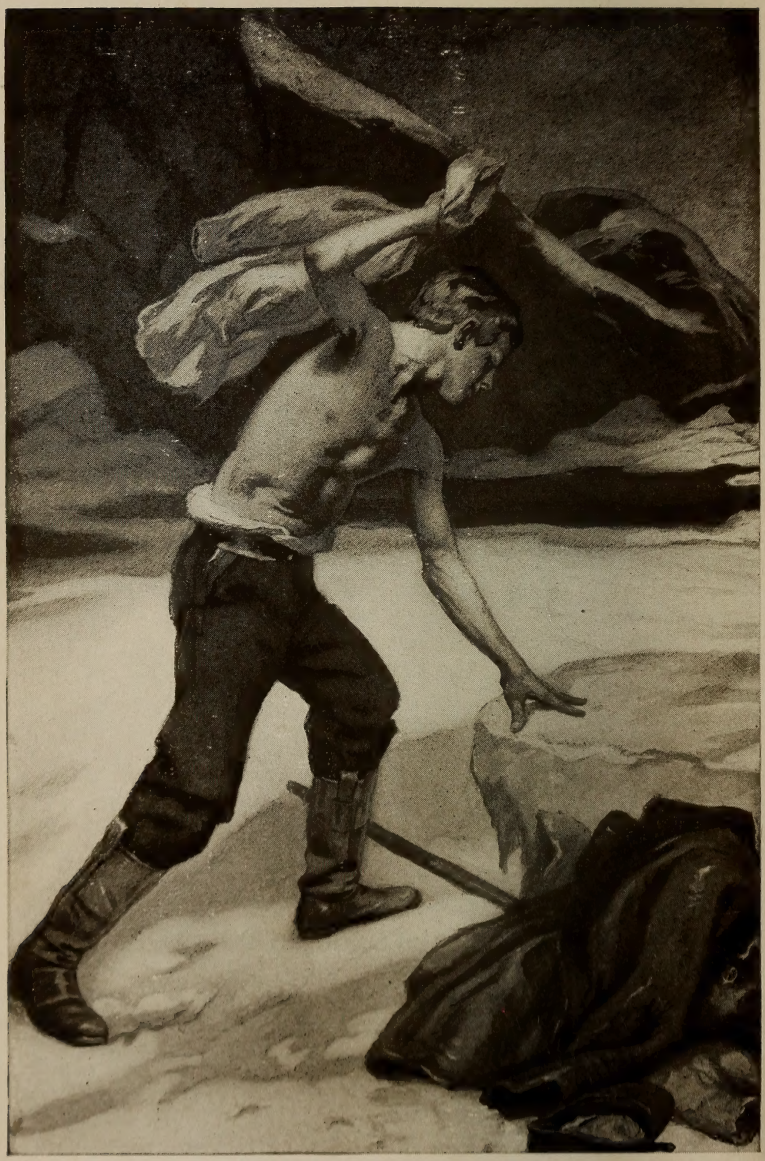
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HIS CLOTHES WERE FROZEN STIFF, AND HE HAD TO BEAT THEM ON THE ICE TO SOFTEN THEM.

THE ADVENTURES OF BILLY TOPSAIL

By

NORMAN DUNCAN

Author of "Doctor Luke of The Labrador," "The Mother," "Dr. Grenfell's Parish"

ILLUSTRATED



New York Chicago Toronto

FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

London and Edinburgh

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FLEMING H. REVELL COMPANY

Third Edition

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 27 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

J. K.

To the editors of the "Youth's Companion" the author's thanks are due for the permission to reprint much of the contents of this book.

To the Boy who Reads the Book

YOU must not be surprised because the adventures of Billy Topsail and a few of his friends fill this book. If *all* the adventures of these real boys were written the record would fill many books. This is not hard to explain. The British Colony of Newfoundland lies to the north of the Gulf of St. Lawrence and to the east of the Canadian Labrador. It is so situated that the inhabitants may not escape adventures. On the map, it looks bleak and far away and inhospitable—a lonely island, outlying in the stormy water of the Atlantic. Indeed, it is all that. The interior is a vast wilderness—a waste place. The folk are fishermen all. They live on the coast, in little harbours, remote, widely scattered, not connected by roads; communication is only by way of the sea. They are hospitable, fearless, tender, simple, willing for toil; and, surely, little else can be said of a people. Long, long ago, their forbears first strayed up that forbidding shore in chase of the fish; and

the succeeding generations, though such men as we are, have there lived their lives, apart from the world's comforts and delights as we know them. The land is barren; sustenance is from the sea, which is moody and cold and gray: thus life in that far place has many perils and deprivations and toilsome duties. The boys of the outports are like English-speaking boys the world over. They are merry or not, brave or not, kind or not, as boys go; but it may be that they are somewhat merrier and braver and kinder than boys to whom self-reliance and physical courage are less needful. At any rate, they have adventures, every one of them; and that is not surprising—for the conditions of life are such that every Newfoundland lad intimately knows hardship and peril at an age when the boys of the cities still grasp a hand when they cross the street.

N. D.

New York, *September*, 1906.

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The publishers acknowledge the courtesy of *The Youth's Companion* and *Outing* for the use of various illustrations appearing originally in these periodicals.

THE ADVENTURES OF BILLY TOPSAIL

CHAPTER I

In Which Young Billy Topsail of Ruddy Cove Puts Out to His First Adventure with His Dog in the Bow of the Punt

FROM the very beginning it was inevitable that Billy Topsail should have adventures. He was a fisherman's son, born at Ruddy Cove, which is a fishing harbour on the bleak northeast coast of Newfoundland; and there was nothing else for it. All Newfoundland boys have adventures; but not all Newfoundland boys survive them. And there came, in the course of the day's work and play, to Billy Topsail, many adventures. The first—the first real adventure in which Billy Topsail was abandoned to his own wit and strength—came by reason of a gust of wind and his own dog. It was not strange that a gust of wind should overturn Billy Topsail's punt; but that old Skipper should

turn troublesome in the thick of the mess was an event the most unexpected. . . .

Skipper was a Newfoundland dog, born of reputable parents at Back Arm and decently bred in Ruddy Cove. He had black hair, short, straight and wiry—the curly-haired breed has failed on the Island—and broad, ample shoulders, which his forbears had transmitted to him from generations of hauling wood.

He was heavy, awkward and ugly, resembling somewhat a great draft-horse. But he pulled with a will, fended for himself, and within the knowledge of men had never stolen a fish; so he had a high place in the hearts of all the people of the Cove, and a safe one in their estimation.

"Skipper! Skipper! Here, b'y!"

The ringing call, in the voice of Billy Topsail, never failed to bring the dog from the kitchen with an eager rush, when the snow lay deep on the rocks, and all the paths of the wilderness were ready for the sled. He stood stock-still for the harness, and at the first "Hi, b'y! Gee up there!" he bounded away with a wagging tail and a glad bark. It was as if nothing pleased him so much on a frosty morning as the prospect of a hard day's work.

If the call came in summer-time when Skipper was dozing in the cool shadow of a flake—a platform of boughs for drying fish—he scrambled to his feet, took his clog[1] in his mouth and ran, all a-quiver for what might come, to where young Billy waited. If the clog were taken off, as it was almost sure to be, it meant sport in the water. Then Skipper would paw the ground and whine until the stick was flung out for him. But best of all he loved to dive for stones.

At the peep of many a day, too, he went out in the punt to the fishing-grounds with Billy Topsail, and there kept the lad good company all the day long. It was because he sat on the little cuddy in the bow, as if keeping a lookout ahead, that he was called Skipper.

"Sure, 'tis a clever dog, that!" was Billy's boast. "He would save life—that dog would!"

This was proved beyond doubt when little Isaiah Tommy Goodman toddled over the wharf-head, where he had been playing with a squid. Isaiah Tommy was four years old, and would

[1] In Newfoundland the law requires that all dogs shall be clogged as a precaution against their killing sheep and goats which run wild. The clog is in the form of a billet of wood, weighing at least seven and a half pounds, and tied to the dog's neck.

surely have been drowned had not Skipper strolled down the wharf just at that moment.

Skipper was obedient to the instinct of all Newfoundland dogs to drag the sons of men from the water. He plunged in and caught Isaiah Tommy by the collar of his pinafore. Still following his instinct, he kept the child's head above water with powerful strokes of his fore paws while he towed him to shore. Then the outcry which Isaiah Tommy immediately set up brought his mother to complete the rescue.

For this deed Skipper was petted for a day and a half, and fed with fried caplin and salt pork, to his evident gratification. No doubt he was persuaded that he had acted worthily. However that be, he continued in merry moods, in affectionate behaviour, in honesty—although the fish were even then drying on the flakes, all exposed—and he carried his clog like a hero.

"Skipper," Billy Topsail would ejaculate, "you *do* be a clever dog!"

One day in the spring of the year, when high winds spring suddenly from the land, Billy Topsail was fishing from the punt, the *Never Give Up*, over the shallows off Molly's Head. It was

"fish weather," as the Ruddy Cove men say—gray, cold and misty. The harbour entrance lay two miles to the southwest. The bluffs which marked it were hardly discernible, for the mist hung thick off the shore. Four punts and a skiff were bobbing half a mile farther out to sea, their crews fishing with hook and line over the side. Thicker weather threatened and the day was near spent.

"'Tis time to be off home, b'y," said Billy to the dog. "'Tis getting thick in the sou'west."

Skipper stretched himself and wagged his tail. He had no word to say, but Billy, who, like all fishermen in remote places, had formed the habit of talking to himself, supplied the answer.

"'Tis that, Billy, b'y," said he. "The punt's as much as one hand can manage in a fair wind. An' 'tis a dead beat to the harbour now."

Then Billy said a word for himself. "We'll put in for ballast. The punt's too light for a gale."

He sculled the punt to the little cove by the Head, and there loaded her with rocks. Her sails, mainsail and tiny jib, were spread, and she was pointed for Grassy Island, on the first leg of her beat into the wind. By this time two other

punts were under way, and the sails of the skiff were fluttering as her crew prepared to beat home for the night. The *Never Give Up* was ahead of the fleet, and held her lead in such fine fashion as made Billy Topsail's heart swell with pride.

The wind had gained in force. It was sweeping down from the hills in gusts. Now it fell to a breeze, and again it came swiftly with angry strength. Nor could its advance be perceived, for the sea was choppy and the bluffs shielded the inshore waters.

"We'll fetch the harbour on the next tack," Billy muttered to Skipper, who was whining in the bow.

He put the steering oar hard alee to bring the punt about. A gust caught the sails. The boat heeled before it, and her gunwale was under water before Billy could make a move to save her. The wind forced her down, pressing heavily upon the canvas.

"Easy!" screamed Billy.

But the ballast of the *Never Give Up* shifted, and she toppled over. Boy and dog were thrown into the sea—the one aft, the other forward. Billy dived deep to escape entanglement with the

rigging of the boat. He had long ago learned the lesson that presence of mind wins half the fight in perilous emergencies. The coward miserably perishes where the brave man survives. With his courage leaping to meet his predicament, he struck out for windward and rose to the surface.

He looked about for the punt. She had been heavily weighted with ballast, and he feared for her. What was he to do if she had been too heavily weighted? Even as he looked she sank. She had righted under water; the tip of the mast was the last he saw of her.

The sea—cold, fretful, vast—lay all about him. The coast was half a mile to windward; the punts, out to sea, were laboriously beating towards him, and could make no greater speed. He had to choose between the punts and the rocks.

A whine—with a strange note in it—attracted his attention. The big dog had caught sight of him, and was beating the water in a frantic effort to approach quickly. But the dog had never whined like that before.

"Hi, Skipper!" Billy called. "Steady, b'y! Steady!"

Billy took off his boots as fast as he could.

The dog was coming nearer, still whining strangely, and madly pawing the water. Billy was mystified. What possessed the dog? It was as if he had been seized with a fit of terror. Was he afraid of drowning? His eyes were fairly flaring. Such a light had never been in them before.

In the instant he had for speculation the boy lifted himself high in the water and looked intently into the dog's eyes. It was terror he saw in them; there could be no doubt about that, he thought. The dog was afraid for his life. At once Billy was filled with dread. He could not crush the feeling down. Afraid of Skipper—the old, affectionate Skipper—his own dog, which he had reared from a puppy! It was absurd.

But he *was* afraid, nevertheless—and he was desperately afraid.

"Back, b'y!" he cried. "Get back, sir!"

CHAPTER II

Concerning the Behaviour of Billy Topsail and His Dog in the Water When the Never Give Up Went to the Bottom, and Closing With an Apology and a Wag of the Tail

IT chanced that Billy Topsail was a strong swimmer. He had learned to swim where the water is cold—cold, often, as the icebergs stranded in the harbour can make it. The water was bitter cold now; but he did not fear it; nor did he doubt that he could accomplish the long swim which lay before him. It was the unaccountable behaviour of the dog which disturbed him—his failure in obedience, which could not be explained. The dog was now within three yards, and excited past all reason.

"Back, sir!" Billy screamed. Get back with you!"

Skipper was not deterred by the command. He did not so much as hesitate. Billy raised his hand as if to strike him—a threatening gesture which had sent Skipper home with his tail between his legs many a time. But it had no effect now.

"Get back!" Billy screamed again.

It was plain that the dog was not to be bidden. Billy threw himself on his back, supported himself with his hands and kicked at the dog with his feet.

Skipper was blinded by the splashing. He whined and held back. Then blindly he came again. Billy moved slowly from him, head foremost, still churning the water with his feet. But, swimming thus, he was no match for the dog. With his head thrown back to escape the blows, Skipper forged after him. He was struck in the jaws, in the throat, and again in the jaws. But he pawed on, taking every blow without complaint, and gaining inch by inch. Soon he was so close that the lad could no longer move his feet freely. Then the dog chanced to catch one foot with his paw, and forced it under. Billy could not beat him off.

No longer opposed, the dog crept up—paw over paw, forcing the boy's body lower and lower. His object was clear to Billy. Skipper, frenzied by terror, the boy thought, would try to save himself by climbing on his shoulders.

"Skipper!" he cried. "You'll drown me! Get back!"

The futility of attempting to command obe-



BILLY RAISED HIS HAND AS IF TO STRIKE HIM.

dience from a crazy dog struck Billy Topsail with force. He must act otherwise, and that quickly, if he were to escape. There seemed to be but one thing to do. He took a long breath and let himself sink—down—down—as deep as he dared. Down—down—until he retained breath sufficient but to strike to the right and rise again.

The dog—as it was made known later—rose as high as he could force himself, and looked about in every direction, with his mouth open and his ears rigidly cocked. He gave two sharp barks, like sobs, and a long, mournful whine. Then, as if acting upon sudden thought, he dived.

For a moment nothing was to be seen of either boy or dog. There was nothing but a choppy sea in that place. Men who were watching thought that both had followed the *Never Give Up* to the bottom.

In the momentary respite under water Billy perceived that his situation was desperate. He would rise, he was sure, but only to renew the struggle. How long he could keep the dog off he could not tell. Until the punts came down to his aid? He thought not.

He came to the surface prepared to dive again.

But Skipper had disappeared. An ejaculation of thanksgiving was yet on the boy's lips when the dog's black head rose and moved swiftly towards him. Billy had a start of ten yards—or something more.

He turned on his side and set off at top speed. There was no better swimmer among the lads of the harbour. Was he a match for a powerful Newfoundland dog? It was soon evident that he was not.

Skipper gained rapidly. Billy felt a paw strike his foot. He put more strength into his strokes. Next the paw struck the calf of his leg. The dog was upon him now—pawing his back. Billy could not sustain the weight. To escape, that he might take up the fight in another way, he dived again.

The dog was waiting when Billy came up—waiting eagerly, on the alert to continue the chase.

"Skipper, old fellow—good old dog!" Billy called in a soothing voice. "Steady, sir! Down, sir—back!"

The dog was not to be deceived. He came, by turns whining and gasping. He was more excited, more determined, than ever. Billy waited for him. The fight was to be face to face.

The boy had determined to keep him off with his hands until strength failed—to drown him if he could. All love for the dog had gone out of his heart. The weeks of close and merry companionship, of romps and rambles and sport, were forgotten. Billy was fighting for life. So he waited without pity, hoping only that his strength might last until he had conquered.

When the dog was within reach Billy struck him in the face. A snarl and an angry snap were the result.

Rage seemed suddenly to possess the dog. He held back for a moment, growling fiercely, and then attacked with a rush. Billy fought as best he could, trying to clutch his enemy by the neck and to force his head beneath the waves. The effort was vain; the dog eluded his grasp and renewed the attack. In another moment he had laid his heavy paws on the boy's shoulders.

The weight was too much for Billy. Down he went; freed himself, and struggled to the surface, gasping for breath. It appeared to him now that he had but a moment to live. He felt his self-possession going from him—and at that moment his ears caught the sound of a voice.

"Put your arm ——"

The voice seemed to come from far away. Before the sentence was completed, the dog's paws were again on Billy's shoulders and the water stopped the boy's hearing. What were they calling to him? The thought that some helping hand was near inspired him. With this new courage to aid, he dived for the third time. The voice was nearer—clearer—when he came up, and he heard every word.

"Put your arm around his neck!" one man cried.

"Catch him by the scruff of the neck!" cried another.

Billy's self-possession returned. He would follow this direction. Skipper swam anxiously to him. It may be that he wondered what this new attitude meant. It may be that he hoped reason had returned to the boy—that at last he would allow himself to be saved. Billy caught the dog by the scruff of the neck when he was within arm's length. Skipper wagged his tail and turned about.

There was a brief pause, during which the faithful old dog determined upon the direction he would take. He espied the punts, which had borne down with all speed. Towards them he

swam, and there was something of pride in his mighty strokes, something of exultation in his whine. Billy struck out with his free hand, and soon boy and dog were pulled over the side of the nearest punt.

Through it all, as Billy now knew, the dog had only wanted to save him.

That night Billy Topsail took Skipper aside for a long and confidential talk. "Skipper," said he, "I beg your pardon. You see, I didn't know what 'twas you wanted. I'm sorry I ever had a hard thought against you, and I'm sorry I tried to drown you. When I thought you only wanted to save yourself, 'twas Billy Topsail you were thinking of. When I thought you wanted to climb atop of me, 'twas my collar you wanted to catch. When I thought you wanted to bite me, 'twas a scolding you were giving me for my foolishness. Skipper, b'y, honest, I beg your pardon. Next time I'll know that all a Newfoundland dog wants is half a chance to tow me ashore. And I'll give him a whole chance. But, Skipper, don't you think you might have given me a chance to do something for myself?"

At which Skipper wagged his tail.

CHAPTER III

Describing the Haunts and Habits of Devil-Fish and Informing the Reader of Billy Topsail's Determination to Make a Capture at all Hazards

WHEN the Minister of Justice for the colony of Newfoundland went away from Ruddy Cove by the bay steamer, he chanced to leave an American magazine at the home of Billy Topsail's father, where he had passed the night. The magazine contained an illustrated article on the gigantic species of cephalopods[1] popularly known as devil-fish.

[1] "The early literature of natural history has, from very remote times, contained allusions to huge species of cephalopods, often accompanied by more or less fabulous and usually exaggerated descriptions of the creatures. . . . The description of the 'poulpe,' or devil-fish, by Victor Hugo, in 'Toilers of the Sea,' with which so many readers are familiar, is quite as fabulous and unreal as any of the earlier accounts, and even more bizarre. . . . Special attention has only recently been called to the frequent occurrence of these 'big squids,' as our fishermen call them, in the waters of Newfoundland and the adjacent coasts. . . . I have been informed by many other fishermen that the 'big squids' are occasionally taken on the Grand Banks and used for bait. Nearly all the specimens hitherto taken appear to have been more or less disabled when first observed, otherwise they probably would not appear at the sur-

Billy Topsail did not know what a cephalopod was; but he did know a squid when he saw its picture, for Ruddy Cove is a fishing harbour, and he had caught many a thousand for bait. So when he found that to the lay mind a squid and a cephalopod were one and the same, save in size, he read the long article from beginning to end, doing the best he could with the strange, long words.

So interested was he that he read it again; and by that time he had learned enough to surprise him, even to terrify him, notwithstanding the writer's assurance that the power and ferocity of the creatures had generally been exaggerated.

He was a lad of sound common sense. He had never wholly doubted the tales of desperate encounters with devil-fish, told in the harbour these many years; for the various descriptions of how the long, slimy arms had curled about the punts had rung too true to be quite disbelieved;

face in the daytime. From the fact that they have mostly come ashore in the night, I infer that they inhabit chiefly the very deep and cold fiords of Newfoundland, and come to the surface only in the night." —From the "Report on the Cephalopods of the Northeastern Coast of America," by A. E. Verrill. Extracted from a report of the Commissioner of Fish and Fisheries, issued by the Government Printing Office at Washington. In this report twenty-five specimens of the large species taken in Newfoundland are described in detail.

but he had considered them somewhat less credible than certain wild yarns of shipwreck, and somewhat more credible than the bedtime stories of mermaids which the grandmothers told the children of the place.

Here, however, in plain print, was described the capture of a giant squid in a bay which lay beyond a point of land that Billy could see from the window.

That afternoon Billy put out in his leaky old punt to "jig" squid for bait. He was so disgusted with the punt—so ashamed of the squat, weather-worn, rotten cast-off—that he wished heartily for a new one all the way to the grounds. The loss of the *Never Give Up* had brought him to humiliating depths.

But when he had once joined the little fleet of boats, he cheerfully threw his grapnel into Bobby Lot's punt and beckoned Bobby aboard. Then, as together they drew the writhing-armed, squirting little squids from the water, he told of the "big squids" which lurked in the deep water beyond the harbour; and all the time Bobby opened his eyes wider and wider.

"Is they just like squids?" Bobby asked.

"But bigger," answered Billy. "Their

bodies is so big as hogsheads. Their arms is thirty-five feet long."

Bobby picked a squid from the heap in the bottom of the boat. It had instinctively turned from a reddish-brown to a livid green, the colour of sea-water; indeed, had it been in the water, its enemy would have had hard work to see it.

He handled it gingerly; but the ugly little creature managed somehow to twine its slender arms about his hand, and swiftly to take hold with a dozen cup-like suckers. The boy uttered an exclamation of disgust, and shook it off. Then he shuddered, laughed at himself, shuddered again. A moment later he chose a dead squid for examination.

"Leave us look at it close," said he. "Then we'll know what a real devil-fish is like. Sure, I've been wantin' to know that for a long, long time."

They observed the long, cylindrical body, flabby and cold, with the broad, flap-like tail attached. The head was repulsively ugly—perhaps because of the eyes, which were disproportionately large, brilliant, and, in the live squid, ferocious.

A group of arms—two long, slender, tentacular

arms, and eight shorter, thicker ones—projected from the region of the mouth, which, indeed, was set in the centre of the ring they formed at the roots. They were equipped with innumerable little suckers, were flexible and active, and as long as the head, body and tail put together.

Closer examination revealed that there was a horny beak, like a parrot's, in the mouth, and that on the under side of the head was a curious tube-like structure.

"Oh, that's his squirter!" Billy explained. "When he wants to back up he points that forward, and squirts out water so hard as he can; and when he wants to go ahead he points it backward, and does the same thing. That's where his ink comes from, too, when he wants to make the water so dirty nobody can see him."

"What does he do with his beak?"

"When he gets his food in his arms he bites out pieces with his beak. He hasn't any teeth; but he's got something just as good—a tongue like a rasp."

"I wouldn't like to be cotched by a squid as big as a hogshead," Bobby remarked, timidly.

"Hut!" said Billy, grimly. "He'd make

short work o' *you!* Why, b'y, they weighs half a ton apiece! I isn't much afraid, though," he added. "They're only squid. Afore I read about them in the book I used to think they was worse than they is—terrible ghostlike things. But they're no worse than squids, only bigger, and ——"

"They're bad enough for *me*," Bobby interrupted.

"And," Billy concluded, "they only comes up in the night or when they're sore wounded and dyin'."

"I'm not goin' out at night, if I can help it," said Bobby, with a canny shake of the head.

"If they was a big squid come up the harbour to your house," said Billy, after a pause, "and got close to the rock, he could put one o' they two long arms in your bedroom window, and ——"

"'Tis in the attic!"

"Never mind that. He could put it in the window and feel around for your bed, and twist that arm around you, and ——"

"I'd cut it off!"

"Anyhow, that's how long they is. And if he knowed you was there, and wanted you, he

could get you. But I'm not so sure that he *would* want you. He couldn't see you, anyhow; and if he could, he'd rather have a good fat salmon."

Bobby shuddered as he looked at the tiny squid in his hand, and thought of the dreadful possibilities in one a thousand times as big.

"You leave them alone, and they'll leave you alone," Billy went on. "But if you once make them mad, they can dart their arms out like lightning. 'Tis time to get, then!"

"I'm goin' to keep an axe in my punt after this," said Bobby, "and if I sees an arm slippin' out of the water——"

"'Tis as big as your thigh!" cried Billy.

"Never mind. If I sees it I'll be able to cut it off."

"If I sees one," said Billy, "I'm goin' to cotch it. It said in the book that they was worth a lot to some people. And if I can sell mine I'm goin' to have a new punt."

But although Bobby Lot and Billy Topsail kept a sharp lookout for giant squids wherever they went, they were not rewarded. There was not so much as a sign of one. By and by, so bold did they become, they hunted for one in the

twilight of summer days, even daring to pry into the deepest coves and holes in the Ruddy Cove rocks.

Notwithstanding the ridicule he had to meet, Bobby never ventured out in the punt without a sharp axe. He could not tell what time he would need it, he said; and thus he formed the habit of making sure that it was in its place before casting off from the wharf.

As autumn drew near they found other things to think of; the big squids passed out of mind altogether.

"Wonderful queer," Billy said, long afterwards, "how things happen when you isn't expectin' them!"

CHAPTER IV

Recounting the Adventure of the Giant Squid of Chain Tickle, in Which the Punt Gets in the Grip of a Gigantic Tentacle and Billy Topsail Strikes With an Axe

ONE day late in September—it was near evening of a gray day—Billy Topsail and Bobby Lot were returning in Bobby's punt from Birds' Nest Islands, whither they had gone to hunt a group of seals, reported to have taken up a temporary residence there. They had a mighty, muzzle-loading, flintlock gun; and they were so delighted with the noise it made that they had exhausted their scanty provision of powder and lead long before the seals were in sight.

They had taken the shortest way home. It lay past Chain Hole, a small, landlocked basin, very deep, with a narrow entrance, which was shallow at low tide. The entrance opened into a broad bay, and was called Chain Tickle.

"What's that in the tickle?" Billy exclaimed, as they were rowing past.

It was a black object, apparently floating

quietly on the surface of the water. The boys gazed at it for a long time, but could make nothing of it. They were completely puzzled.

"'Tis a small bit o' wreck, I'm thinkin'," said Bobby. "Leave us row close and see."

"Maybe 'tis a capsized punt."

When they were within about thirty yards of the object they lay on their oars. For some unaccountable reason they did not care to venture nearer. Twilight was then fast approaching. The light was already beginning to fail.

"'Tis a wonderful queer thing!" Billy muttered, his curiosity getting the better of him. "Row ahead, Bobby. We'll go alongside."

"They's something movin' on it!" Bobby whispered, as he let his oars fall in the water. "Look! They's two queer, big, round spots on it—big as plates."

Billy thought he saw the whole object move. He watched it closely. It *did* stir! It was some living thing, then. But what? A whale?

A long, snakelike arm was lifted out of the water. It swayed this way and that, darted here and there, and fell back with a splash. The moving spots, now plainly gigantic eyes, glittered.

"'Tis the devil-fish!" screamed Bobby.

Another arm was lifted up, then a third and a fourth and a fifth. The monster began to lash the water—faster and yet more furiously—until the tickle was heaving and frothy, and the whole neighbourhood was in an uproar.

"Pull! Pull!" cried Bobby.

Billy, too, was in a panic. They turned the head of the punt and pulled with all their might. The water swirled in the wake of the boat. Perceiving, however, that the squid made no effort to follow, they got the better of their fright. Then they lay on their oars to watch the monster.

They wondered why it still lay in the tickle, why it so furiously lashed the water with its arms and great tail. It was Bobby who solved the mystery.

"'Tis aground," said he.

That was evidently the situation. The squid had been caught in the shallow tickle when the tide, which ran swiftly at that point, was on the ebb. The boys took courage. Their curiosity still further emboldened them. So once more they turned the punt about and pulled cautiously towards the tickle.

There was less light than before, but still suf-

ficient to disclose the baleful eyes and writhing arms of the squid when the boat was yet a safe distance away. One by one the arms fell back into the water, as if from exhaustion; slowly the beating of the tail subsided. After a time all sound and motion ceased. The boys waited for some further sign of life, but none came. The squid was still, as if dead.

"Sure, he's dead now," said Billy. "Leave us pull close up."

"Oh, no, b'y! He's but makin' believe."

But Billy thought otherwise. "I wants that squid," he said, in a dogged way, "and I'm goin' to have him. I'll sell him and get a new punt."

Bobby protested in vain. Nothing would content Billy Topsail but the possession of the big squid's body. Bobby pointed out that if the long, powerful arms were once laid on the boat there would be no escape. He recalled to Billy the harbour story of the horrible death of Zachariah North, who, as report said, had been pursued, captured and pulled under water by a devil-fish in Gander Bay.[1]

[1] Stories of this kind, of which there are many, are doubted by the authorities, who have found it impossible to authenticate a single instance of unprovoked attack.

It was all to no purpose, however, for Billy obstinately declared that he would make sure of the squid before the tide turned. He admitted a slight risk, but he wanted a new punt, and he was willing to risk something to obtain it.

He proposed to put Bobby ashore, and approach the squid alone; but Bobby would not listen. Two hands might be needed in the boat, he said. What if the squid were alive, after all? What if it laid hold of the punt? In that event, two hands would surely be needed.

"I'll go," he said. "But leave us pull slow. And if we sees so much as a wink of his eye we'll pull away."

They rowed nearer, with great caution. Billy was in the bow of the boat. It was he who had the axe. Bobby, seated amidships, faced the bow. It was he who did the rowing.

The squid was quiet. There was not a sign of life about it. Billy estimated the length of its body, from the beak to the point of the tail, as twenty feet, the circumference as "the size of a hogshead." Its tentacular arms, he determined, must be at least thirty-five feet long; and when the boat came within that distance he shuddered.



THEN LIKE A FLASH IT SHOT TOWARD THE BOAT.

"Is you sure he's dead?" Bobby whispered, weakly.

"I don't know!" Billy answered, in a gasp. "I thinks so."

Bobby dropped the oars and stepped to the bow of the punt. The boat lost way and came to a stop within twenty feet of the squid. Still there was no sign of life.

The boys stared at the great, still body, lying quiet in the gathering dusk and haze. Neither seemed to feel the slight trembling of the boat that might have warned them. Not a word was spoken until Billy, in a whisper, directed Bobby to pull the boat a few feet nearer.

"But we're movin' already," he added, in a puzzled way.

The boat was very slowly approaching the squid. The motion was hardly perceptible, but it was real.

"'Tis queer!" said Bobby.

He turned to take up the oars. What he saw lying over the port gunwale of the boat made him gasp, grip Billy's wrist and utter a scream of terror!

"We're cotched!"

The squid had fastened one of its tentacles to

the punt. The other was poised above the stern, ready to fall and fix its suckers. The onward movement of the punt was explained.

Billy knew the danger, but he was not so terrified as to be incapable of action. He was about to spring to the stern to strike off the tentacle that already lay over the gunwale; but as he looked down to choose his step he saw that one of the eight powerful arms was slowly creeping over the starboard bow.

He struck at that arm with all his might, missed, wrenched the axe from the gunwale, and struck true. The mutilated arm was withdrawn. Billy leaped to the stern, vaguely conscious in passing that another arm was creeping from the water. He severed the first tentacle with one blow. When he turned to strike the second it had disappeared; so, too, had the second arm. The boat seemed to be free, but it was still within grasp.

In the meantime the squid had awakened to furious activity. It was lashing the water with arms and tail, angrily snapping its great beak and ejecting streams of black water from its siphon-tube. The water was violently agitated and covered with a black froth.

In this the creature manifested fear and distress. Had it not been aground it would have backed swiftly into the deep water of the basin. But, as if finding itself at bay, it lifted its uninjured tentacle high above the boat. Billy made ready to strike.

By this time Bobby had mastered his terror. While Billy stood with uplifted axe, his eyes fixed on the waving tentacle overhead, Billy heaved mightily on the oars. The boat slowly drew away from that highly dangerous neighbourhood. In a moment it was beyond reach of the arms, but still, apparently, within reach of the tentacle. The tentacle was withdrawn a short distance; then like a flash it shot towards the boat, writhing as it came.

Billy struck blindly—and struck nothing. The tentacle had fallen short. The boat was out of danger!

But still Billy Topsail was determined to have the body of the squid. Notwithstanding Bobby's pleading and protestation, he would not abandon his purpose. He was only the more grimly bent on achieving it. Bobby would not hear of again approaching nearer than the boat then floated,

nor did Billy think it advisable. But it occurred to Bobby that they might land, and approach the squid from behind. If they could draw near enough, he said, they could cast the grapnel on the squid's back, and moor it to a tree ashore.

"Sure," he said, excitedly, "you can pick up a squid from behind, and it can't touch you with its arms! It won't be able to see us, and it won't be able to reach us."

So they landed. Billy carried the grapnel, which was attached to twelve fathoms of line. It had six prongs, and each prong was barbed.

A low cliff at the edge of the tickle favoured the plan. The squid lay below, and some twenty feet out from the rock. It was merely a question of whether or not Billy was strong enough to throw the grapnel so far. They tied the end of the line to a stout shrub. Billy cast the grapnel, and it was a strong, true cast. The iron fell fair on the squid's back. It was a capture.

"That means a new punt for me," said Billy, quietly. "The tide'll not carry *that* devil-fish away."

"And now," Bobby pleaded, "leave us make haste home, for 'tis growin' wonderful dark—and —and there might be another somewhere."

So that is how one of the largest specimens of *Architeuthis princeps*—enumerated in Prof. John Adam Wright's latest monograph on the cephalopods of North America as the "Chain Tickle specimen"—was captured. And that is how Billy Topsail fairly won a new punt; for when Doctor Marvey, the curator of the Public Museum at St. John's—who is deeply interested in the study of the giant squids—came to Ruddy Cove to make photographs and take measurements, in response to a message from Billy's father, he rewarded the lad.

CHAPTER V

On the Face of the Cliff: Wherein Billy Topsail Gets Lost in a Perilous Place and Sits Down to Recover His Composure

IN summer, when there chanced to be no fish, or when no bait was to be had, and the fish were not to be jigged, Billy Topsail had idle time, which he was not slow to improve for his own amusement. Often he wandered on the cliffs and heads near the harbour—not always for gulls' eggs: sometimes for sheer love of the sky and space and sunlit air. Once, being bound for Breakheart Head, to watch the waves beat on the rocks below, he came across old Arch Butt.

"Wonderful sea outside," said the old fisherman. "Wonderful sea, Billy. 'Tis as big a tumble as ever I seed stirred up in a night."

"An' you'll not be takin' the punt t' the grounds?" Billy asked, in surprise.

"I'm not able, lad. 'Tis too much for any paddle-punt. Sure, the sea's breakin' right across the tickle. 'Tis so much as a man's life is worth t' try t' run out."

"Isn't you got a salmon net off Shag Rock?"

"I is that," Arch answered; "an' I'm wantin' bad t' get to it. 'Tis set off the point of Shag Rock, an' I'm thinkin' the sea will wreck it, for 'tis a wonderful tumble, indeed. 'Tis like I'll not be able t' get out afore to-morrow mornin', but I'm hopin' I will."

"An' I hopes you may, Skipper Arch," said Billy.

It was a fine wish, born of the fresh breeze and brightness of the day—a word let drop from a heart full of good feeling for all the world: nothing more. Yet within a few hours Billy Topsail's life hung upon the possibility of its fulfillment.

"Ay," he repeated, "I hopes you may."

Billy Topsail followed the rocky road to the Bath Tub, climbed the Lookout, and descended the rough declivity beyond to the edge of the sea, meanwhile lifted to a joyous mood by the sunlight and wind and cloudless sky. Indeed, he was not sorry he had come; the grim cliffs and the jagged masses of rock lying at their feet—the thunder and froth where sea met rock—the breaking, flashing water to seaward; all this delighted him then, and were not soon forgotten. Best of all, the third submerged rock off Shag Cliff—the rock they call the Tombstone—was

breaking; the greater waves there leaped into the air in fountains of froth.

"I 'low I'll get closer t' the Tombstone," thought he.

Thus he was led along the coast to the foot of Shag Cliff. It was a hard climb, in which hands and feet were both concerned. There were chasms to leap, sharp points to round, great rocks to scale, narrow ledges to pass over on the toes of his boots; and all the while the breakers were crashing and foaming below him, and now and again splashing him with spray.

Had the day been drear, it may be he would not have ventured so far; but the sun was out, the day long, the gulls quietly soaring over the sea, and on he went, giving no thought whatever to his return.

Once under the cliff, he ventured farther. Detached from it, there lies Nanny's Rock, which must long ago have fallen from above; the breakers surrounded but did not sweep it when they rose and broke.

His wish to lie there in the sunshine, with the blue sky above him and the noise of the water in his ears, led him to dash across the dripping space between when the wave fell back, even

though he must scramble out of the way of the returning water.

In a few minutes he was deep in an enchanting day-dream, which, to his subsequent peril, soon changed to sleep.

The tide was rising. A few drops of spray, falling upon his face from a great breaker, awoke him. On the instant he was wide awake and looking desperately about. Then he laughed to think that the breakers were reaching for him—that they would have had him fast in the trap had he slept much longer; for, in a glance, he thought he had made sure that his escape from the rock was not yet cut off. But his laugh was touched with some embarrassment when he found, upon trial, that the sea had blocked the path by which he had reached the foot of Shag Cliff.

"I must go 'tother way," he thought.

There was no other way; to right and to left the sea was breaking against overhanging juts of rock. He could pass from jut to jut, but he could round neither.

"Sure, I'll be late for dinner," he thought; "an' dad won't like it."

It was all very well to exclaim vexatiously, but he was forced to abandon the hope of return-

ing by way of the foot of the cliffs. The tide had cut him off.

"I'll scale Shag Cliff," he determined.

He was not alarmed; the situation was awkward, but it promised the excitement of an adventure, and for a time he was rather glad that he had fallen asleep. To scale the two hundred feet of Shag Cliff—that was something to achieve! His father would say that he was "narvy," and forget that he had kept him from his dinner. Scale Shag Cliff, by all means!

He knew well enough that he had but to seek higher ground and wait for the tide to fall, if he wanted an unexciting return; but it pleased him to make believe that his situation was desperate —that the rising water would overwhelm him if he did not escape over the brow of the cliff: an indulgence which his imagination did not need half an hour later. When he looked up, however, to choose a path of ascent, he found that, from where he stood, close against the cliff at the base, there seemed to be no path at all.

"I 'low I'll have t' go back t' Nanny's Rock for a better squint," he told himself.

Back to Nanny's Rock he went, at no small risk, for the occasional flow of foam, which had

cut it off from the mainland when first he crossed, had swollen to a strait of some depth and strength. He must make the leap, but he dreaded it. There was a moment of terror when his foot slipped, and he came near falling back into the very claws of the breaker which followed him; on that account, perhaps, his survey of the face of the cliff was a hurried one, and his return to safe ground precipitate and somewhat flurried.

He had seen enough, however, to persuade him that the ascent would be comparatively easy for at least a hundred feet, and that, for the rest of the way, it would not, probably, be much more difficult.

In point of fact, he knew nothing whatever of what lay beyond the first hundred feet. But the element of probability, or rather improbability, did not disconcert him. He could at least make a start.

If you have ever climbed about a rocky sea-cost, you will know that an ascent may be comparatively simple where a descent is quite impracticable; you will know that the unwary may of a sudden reach a point where to continue the climb is a nauseating necessity. There are times when one regrets the courage that led him into

his difficulty—the courage or the carelessness, as the case may be.

Experience had long ago taught Billy Topsail that; but the lesson had not been severe—there had been no gulf behind him ; the whip of life or death had not urged him on. Indeed, he had never attempted a climb of such height and ugly possibilities in the way of blind leads as Shag Cliff, else possibly he should not have made the start with a sense of adventure so inspiring.

Up he went—up and still up, his cheeks glowing, his nerves pleasurably tingling! Up—up and still up, until he could hear the whiz of gulls' wings near him, and the feeling of space below began to try his nerves. At last he stopped to rest and look about. Down deep lay the breakers, so far off, it seemed, that he marvelled he could hear the roar and crash so distinctly.

"An' they says 'tis a hundred feet!" thought he. "Hut! 'Tis two hundred if 'tis an inch. An' I isn't but half way up!"

Beyond that point his difficulties began. The cliff was bolder ; it was almost bare of those little ledges and crevices and projections upon which the cliff-climber depends for handhold and foothold. Moreover, the path was interrupted from

time to time by sheer or overhanging rock. When he came to these impassable places, of course, he turned to right or left, content with his progress if only he mounted higher and higher. Thus he strayed far off the path he had picked out from Nanny's Rock; indeed, he was climbing blindly, a thoughtless course, for—had he but stopped to think—there was no knowing that the cliff did not overhang at the end of the way he had taken.

Meanwhile, time was passing. He had climbed with such caution, retraced his steps, changed his course so often that noon was long past. So when next he came to a roomy ledge he sat down to rest before proceeding farther.

"Wonderful queer!" he thought, after a look about. "But where is I?"

It was a puzzling question. The cliff, projecting below him, cut off his view of the breakers; and the rock above, which came to an end in blue sky, was of course unfamiliar. At what part of Shag Rock he then was he could not tell.

CHAPTER VI

In Which Billy Topsail Loses His Nerve. Wherein, also, the Wings of Gulls Seem to Brush Past

"WONDERFUL queer!" thought Billy Topsail. "Lost on a cliff! 'Tis the queerest thing I ever knowed."

But that was Billy's case.

"I 'low," he concluded, at last, "that I'd better be goin' up instead o' down."

It did not appear that he would be unable to go down; the way up was the shorter way, that was all. Nevertheless, his feeling of security was pretty well shaken when he again began to climb. His grip was tighter, his shrinking from the depths stronger and more frequent; in fact, he hugged the rock more than was good for him.

He knew the symptom for an alarming one—it turned him faint when first he recognized it—and he tried to fix his attention upon the effort to climb higher. But now and again the fear of the space behind and below would creep in. Reason told him that the better part was to re-

turn; but he was in no condition to listen to reason. His whole desire—it was fast becoming frantic—was to crawl over the brow of the cliff and be safe.

But where was the brow of the cliff? It seemed to him that he had climbed a thousand feet.

A few minutes later he caught sight of a shrub; then he knew that he was within a few feet of the end of the climb. The shrub—a stunted spruce, which he had good reason to remember—was to his right, peeping round a projection of rock.

He was then on a ledge, with good foothold and good handhold; and a way of return to the shore lay open to him. By craning his neck he made out that if he could pass that projection he would reach shelving, broken rock, and be safe. Then he studied the face of the rocks between—a space of some six feet.

There was foothold there, midway, but he shrank from attempting to reach it. He had never thought in his life to try so perilous a passage. A survey of the course of a body falling from that point was almost more than he could support. Nevertheless, strange as it may seem,

the waving shrub tempted him to risk something more to end his suspense. He summoned courage enough to stretch out his right foot and search with his right hand for a hold.

Unfortunately, he found both—a ledge for his foot and a crevice for his fingers.

He drew himself over. It took courage and strength, for it was a long stretch. Had he been cramped for room, had he not been free to move at the starting-point, he could not have managed it. But there he was—both feet on a ledge as wide as his feet were long, both hands with a comfortable grip on solid rock. He shuffled along until he came to the end of the ledge.

His last obstacle now lay before him. He must round the projection which divided him from the broken, shelving rock beyond. Had he foreseen the slightest difficulty he would not have gone so far. So, with confidence, he sought a foothold for his right foot—a crevice for the fingers of his right hand.

And he tried again, with confidence unshaken; again, with patience; again, with rising fear. There was no hold; the passage was impracticable. There was nothing for it but to return.

So he shuffled back to the other end of the

ledge. Then, keenly regretting the necessity of return, he sought a foothold for his left foot—a crevice for the fingers of his left hand. He tried again, in some wonder; again, with a rush of fear; again, in abject terror.

To his horror, he found that he could not return. From the narrow ledge it was impossible to pass to the wider, although it had been possible to pass from the wider to the narrow. For an instant he was on the point of toppling back; but he let his body fall forward against the face of the cliff, and there he rested, gripping the rock with both hands until the faintness passed.

The situation was quite plain to him. He was standing on a ledge, as wide as his feet were long, some two or three hundred feet above the sea; his face was to the cliff, and he could neither sit down nor turn round. There he must stand until—who could tell? In what way could relief come to him? Who was to see? Who could hear his cries for help? No fishermen were on the grounds—no punts were out of the harbour; the sea was too high for that, as he had been told.

There was only one answer to his question. He must stand until—he fell.

"Yes," he was courageous enough to admit calmly, "I 'low I got t' go."

That once admitted, his terror of that space behind and below in some measure departed. The sun was still shining; the sky—as he knew, for he could catch a glimpse of it on each side—was still blue. But soon he began to think of the night; then his terror returned—not of the present moment, but of the hours of darkness approaching.

Could he endure until night? He thought not. His position was awkward. Surely his strength would wear out—his hands weaken, although the strain upon them was slight; his legs give way.

Of course he followed the natural impulse to cling to his life as long as he could. Thus, while the afternoon dragged along and the dusk approached, he stood on the face of the cliff, waiting for the moment when his weakening strength would fail and he would fall to his death.

"In an hour," he thought; soon it was, "In half an hour."

Before that last half-hour had passed he felt something brush past his back. It frightened

him. What was it? Again he felt it. Again it startled and frightened him. Then he felt it no more for a time, and he was glad of that. He was too dull, perhaps, to dwell upon the mystery of that touch. It passed from his mind. Soon he felt it for the third time. Was it a wing? He wondered, too, if he had not heard a voice; for it seemed to him that some one had hailed him.

When next he heard the sound, he knew that his name had been called. He looked up. A rope was hanging over the brow of the cliff, sweeping slowly towards him. He could see it, although the light was failing. When it came near he extended his right hand behind him and caught it, then gave it a tug, in signal to those above that the search was ended. Painfully, slowly, for his situation was none too secure, he encircled his waist with that stout rope, lashed it fast, shouted, "Haul away!" and fainted.

When Billy Topsail came to his senses, it was to find himself lying on the moss, with old Arch, the skipper, leaning over him, and half a dozen fishermen gathered round.

"So you did get out to the salmon net?" he muttered.

"Aye," said Arch; "'twas I that seed you hangin' there. Sure, if I hadn't had my net set off Shag Rock, and if I hadn't got through the tickle to see if 'twas all right, and if ——"

Billy shuddered.

CHAPTER VII

In Which Billy Topsail Hears the Fur Trader's Story of a Jigger and a Cake of Ice in the Wind

"WOULDN'T think I'd been born on Cherry Hill, would you, now?" said the man with the fur cap.

The stranger had been landed at Ruddy Cove from Fortune Harbour. He had been in the far north, he said; and he was now waiting for the mail-boat to take him south. Billy Topsail and the lads of Ruddy Cove cocked their ears for a yarn.

"Fact!" said he, with a nod. "That's where I was born and bred. And do you know how I come to be away up here? No? Well, I'm a fur trader. I'm the man that bought the skin of that silver fox last winter for thirty dollars and sold it for two hundred and fifty. I'd rather be the man that bought it from me and sold it in London for six hundred. But I'm not."

"And you're bound for home, now?" the old skipper asked.

"Yes," he drawled. "I'm bound home for New York to see the folks. I've been away six years, and came nearer to leaving my bones up here in the north last spring than ever I did before. I've done some travelling in my time. You can take me at my word; I have."

The trader laughed uproariously. He was in a voluble mood. The old skipper knew that he needed but little encouragement to tell the story of his escape.

"It makes me think about that old riddle of the corked bottle," he said. "Ever hear it? This is it: If you had a bottle of ginger ale, how would you get the stuff out without breaking the bottle or drawing the cork? Can you answer that?"

"The answer doesn't strike me," said the skipper.

"That's just it," the trader burst out. "The way to do it doesn't 'strike you.' But if you had the bottle in your hands now and wanted the ginger ale, it would 'strike' you fast enough to push the cork in. Well, that was my case. You think of yourself on a little pan of ice, drifting straight out to sea with a strong offshore wind, water all round you and no paddle—just think

of yourself in that case, and a way of getting ashore might not 'strike' you. But once you're there—once you're right on that pan of ice, with the hand of death on your collar—you'll think like lightning of all the things you can do. Yes, that was my case."

The listeners said nothing to interrupt the stocky, hard-featured, ill-clad little man while he mused.

"'Don't you be fool enough to try to cross the bay this evening,' says I to myself," he went on.

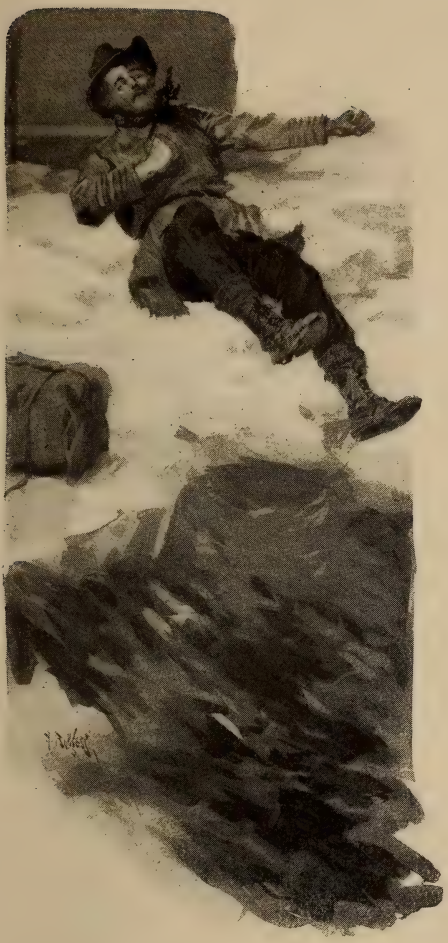
"But I'm a hundred-mile man, and I'd gone my hundred miles. I can carry grub on my back to last me just that far; and my grub was out. From what I knew of winds and ice, I judged that the ice would be four or five miles out to sea by dawn of the next day. So I didn't start out with the idea that the trip would be as easy as a promenade over Brooklyn Bridge of a moonlight night. Oh, no! I knew what I was doing. But it was a question of taking the risk or dragging myself into the settlement at Racquet Harbour in three days' time as lean as a car-horse from starvation. You see, it was forty miles round that bay and four across; and—my grub was out. Many a man loses his life in these

parts by looking at the question in just that way.

"'Oh, no!' says I to myself. 'You'd much better take your chance of starving, and walk round.'

"It wasn't in human nature, though, to do it. Not when I knew that there was grub and a warm fire waiting for me at Racquet Harbour. Says I, 'I'll take the long chance and stand to win.' Don't you run away with the idea that the ice was a level field stretching from shore to shore, fitting the rocks, and kept as neat as a baseball diamond. It wasn't. Some day in the winter the wind had jammed the bay full of big rough chunks—they call them pans in this country—and the frost had stuck them all together. When the spring came, of course the sun began to melt that glue, and the whole floe was just ready to fall apart when I had the bad luck to make the coast. I was a day too late. I knew it. And I knew that the offshore wind would sweep the ice to sea the minute it broke up.

"I made the first hundred yards in ten minutes; the second in fifteen more. In half an hour I'd made half a mile. The ice was rough enough and flimsy enough to take the nerve out of any man. But that wasn't the worst; the



"JUMPED LIKE A STAG FOR THE SECOND PAN."

worst was that there were hundreds of holes covered with a thin crust of snow—all right to look at, but treacherous. I knew that if I made the mistake of stepping on a crust instead of solid ice, I'd go through and down.

"I had four otter skins, some martens and ten fine fox skins in the pack on my back. To do anything in the water with that handicap was too much for me. So I wasn't at all particular about making time until I found that the night would catch me if I didn't wag along a little faster.

"No, sir!" the trader said. "I didn't want to be caught out there in the dark.

"By good luck, I struck some big pans about half-way over. Then I took to a dog-trot, and left the yards behind me in a way that cheered me up. Just before dusk I got near enough to the other side to feel proud of myself, and I began to think of what a fool I'd have been if I'd taken the shore route. A minute later I changed my mind. I felt the pack moving! Well, in a flash I said good-bye to Cherry Hill and the boys. Not many men are caught twice in a place like that. They never have the second chance.

"There I was, aboard a rotten floe and bound

out to the big, lonely ocean at the rate of four miles an hour.

"'Oh, you might as well get ready to go, Jim,' thinks I. But I didn't give up. I loped along shoreward in a way that didn't take snow crust or air-holes into account. And I made the edge of the floe before the black hours of the night had come.

"There was a couple of hundred yards of cold water between me and the shore.

"'This is the time you think more of your life than your fur,' thinks I.

"There was a stray pan or two—little rafts of things—lying off the edge of the floe; and beyond them, scattered between the shore and me, half a dozen other pans were floating. How to get from one to the other was the puzzle. They were fifty or sixty yards apart, most of them, and I had no paddle. It was foolish to think of making a shift with my jacket for a sail; the wind was out, not in, and I had no rudder.

"What had I? Nothing that I could think of. It didn't *strike* me, as you say. I wish it had.

"'Anyhow,' says I to myself, 'I'll get as far as I can.'

"It was a short leap from the floe to the first

pan. I made it easily. The second pan was farther off, but I thought I could jump the water between. So I took off my pack and threw it on the ice beside me. It almost broke my heart to do it, for I'd walked five hundred miles in the dead of winter for that fur; I'd been nearly starved and frozen, and I'd paid out hard-earned money. I put down my pack, took a short run, and jumped like a stag for the second pan.

"I landed on the spot I'd picked out. I can't complain of missing the mark, but instead of stopping there, I shot clear through and down into the water.

"Surprised? I was worse than that. I was dead scared. For a minute I thought I was going to rise under the ice and drown right there.

"How it happened I don't know; but I came up between the pans, and struck out for the one I'd left. I got to the pan, all right, and climbed aboard. There I was, on a little pan of ice, beyond reach of the floe and leaving the shore behind me, and cold and pretty well discouraged.

"There's the riddle of the corked bottle," said the trader, interrupting his narrative. "Now how do I happen to be sitting here?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," said the skipper.

"No more you should," said he, "for you don't know what I carried in my pack. But you see I had the bottle in my hands, and I wanted the ginger ale bad; so I thought fast and hard.

"It struck me that I might do something with my line and jigger.[1] Don't you see the chance the barbed steel hooks and the forty fathom of line gave me? When I thought of that jigger I felt just like the man who is told to push the cork in when he can't draw it out. I'd got back to the pan where I'd thrown down my pack, you know; so there was the jigger, right at hand.

"It was getting dark by this time—getting dark fast, and the pans were drifting farther and farther apart.

"It was easy to hook the jigger in the nearest pan and draw my pan over to it; for that pan was five times the weight of the one I was on. The one beyond was about the same size; they came together at the half-way point. Of course this took time. I could hardly see the shore then, and it struck me that I might not be able

[1] A jigger is a lead fish, about three inches long, which spreads into two large barbed hooks at one end; the other end is attached to about forty fathoms of stout line. Jiggers are used to jerk fish from the water where there is no bait.

to find it at all, when I came near enough to cast my jigger for it.

"About fifty yards off was a big pan. I swung the jigger round and round and suddenly let the line shoot through my fingers. When I hauled it in the jigger came too, for it hadn't taken hold. That made me feel bad. I felt worse when it came back the second time. But I'm not one of the kind that gives up. I kept right on casting that jigger until it landed in the right spot.

"My pan crossed over as I hauled in the line. That was all right; but there was no pan between me and the shore.

"'All up!' thinks I.

"It was dark. I could see neither pan nor shore. Before long I couldn't see a thing in the pitchy blackness.

"All the time I could feel the pan humping along towards the open sea. I didn't know how far off the shore was. I was in doubt about just where it was.

"'Is this pan turning round?' thinks I. Well, I couldn't tell; but I thought I'd take a flier at hooking a rock or a tree with the jigger.

"The jigger didn't take hold. I tried a dozen times, and every time I heard it splash the water.

But I kept on trying—and would have kept on till morning if I'd needed to. You can take me at my word, I'm not the kind of fool that gives up — I've been in too many tight places for that. So, at last, I gave the jigger a fling that landed it somewhere where it held fast; but whether ice or shore I couldn't tell. If shore, all right; if ice, all wrong; and that's all I could do about it.

"'Now,' thinks I, as I began to haul in, 'it all depends on the fishing line. Will it break, or won't it?'

"It didn't. So the next morning, with my pack on my back, I tramped round the point to Racquet Harbour."

"What was it?" was Billy Topsail's foolish question. "Shore or ice?"

"If it hadn't been shore," said the trader, "I wouldn't be here."

CHAPTER VIII

In the Offshore Gale: In Which Billy Topsail Goes Seal Hunting and is Swept to Sea With the Floe

WHAT befell old Tom Topsail and his crew came in the course of the day's work. Fishermen and seal-hunters, such as the folk of Ruddy Cove, may not wait for favourable weather; when the fish are running, they must fish; when the seals are on the drift-ice offshore in the spring, they must hunt.

So on that lowering day, when the seals were sighted by the watch on Lookout Head, it was a mere matter of course that the men of the place should set out to the hunt.

"I s'pose," Tom Topsail drawled, "that we'd best get under way."

Bill Watt, his mate, scanned the sky in the northeast. It was heavy, cold and leaden; fluffy gray towards the zenith, and black where the clouds met the barren hills.

"I s'pose," said he, catching Topsail's drawl, "that 'twill snow afore long."

"Oh, aye," was the slow reply, "I s'pose 'twill."

Again Bill Watt faced the sullen sky. He felt that the supreme danger threatened—snow with wind.

"I s'pose," he said, "that 'twill blow, too."

"Oh, aye," Topsail replied, indifferently, "snow 'n' blow. We'll know what 'twill do when it begins," he added. "Billy, b'y!" he shouted.

In response Billy Topsail came bounding down the rocky path from the cottage. He was stout for his age, with broad shoulders, long thick arms and large hands. There was a boy's flush of expectation on his face, and the flash of a boy's delight in his eyes. He was willing for adventure.

"Bill an' me'll take the rodney," Topsail drawled. "I s'pose you might's well fetch the punt, an' we'll send you back with the first haul."

"Hooray!" cried Billy; and with that he waved his cap and sped back up the hill.

"Fetch your gaff, lad!" Topsail called after him. "Make haste! There's Joshua Rideout with his sail up. 'Tis time we was off."

"Looks more'n ever like snow," Bill Watt ob-

served, while they waited. "I'm thinkin' '*twill* snow."

"Oh, maybe 'twon't," said Topsail, optimistic in a lazy way.

The ice-floe was two miles or more off the coast; thence it stretched to the horizon—a vast, rough, blinding white field, formed of detached fragments. Some of the "pans" were acres in size; others were not big enough to bear the weight of a man; all were floating free, rising and falling with the ground swell.

The wind was light, the sea quiet, the sky thinly overcast. Had it not been for the threat of heavy weather in the northeast, it would have been an ideal day for the hunt. The punt and the rodney, the latter far in the lead, ran quietly out from the harbour, with their little sails all spread. From the punt Billy Topsail could soon see the small, scattered pack of seals—black dots against the white of the ice.

When the rodney made the field, the punts of the harbour fleet had disappeared in the winding lanes of open water that led through the floe. Tom Topsail was late. The nearer seals were all marked by the hunters who had already landed. The rodney would have to be taken

farther in than the most venturesome hunter had yet dared to go—perilously far into the midst of the shifting pans.

The risk of sudden wind—the risk that the heavy fragments would "pack" and "nip" the boat—had to be taken if seals were to be killed.

"We got to go right in, Bill," said Topsail, as he furled the rodney's sails.

"I s'pose," was Watt's reply, with a backward glance to the northeast. "An' Billy?"

"'Tis not wise to take un in," Topsail answered, hastily. "We'll have un bide here."

Billy was hailed, and, to his great disappointment, warned to keep beyond the edge of the floe. Then the rodney shot into the lane, with Topsail and Bill Watt rowing like mad. She was soon lost to sight. Billy shipped his sail and paddled to the edge of the ice, to wait, as patiently as might be, for the reappearance of the rodney.

Patience soon gave way to impatience, impatience to anxiety, anxiety to great fear for the lives of his father and the mate, for the offshore gale was driving up; the blue-black clouds were already high and rising swiftly.

At last there came an ominous puff of wind. It swept over the sea from the coast, whipping up little waves in its course—frothy little waves, that hissed. Heavy flakes of snow began to fall. As the wind rose they fell faster, and came driving, swirling with it.

With the fall of the first flakes the harbour fleet came pell-mell from the floe. Not a man among them but wished himself in a sheltered place. Sails were raised in haste, warnings were shouted; then off went the boats, beating up to harbour with all sail set.

"Make sail, lad!" old Elisha Bull shouted to Billy, as his punt swung past.

Billy shook his head. "I'll beat back with father!" he cried.

"You'll lose yourself!" Elisha screamed, as a last warning, before his punt carried him out of hail.

But Billy still hung at the edge of the ice. His father had said, "Bide here till we come out," and "bide" there he would.

He kept watch for the rodney, but no rodney came. Minute after minute flew by. He hesitated. Was it not his duty to beat home? There was still the fair chance that he might be able to

make the harbour. Did he not owe a duty to his mother—to himself?

But a crashing noise from the floe brought him instantly to a decision. He knew what that noise meant. The ice was feeling the force of the wind. It would pack and move out to sea. The lane by which the rodney had entered then slowly closed.

In horror Billy watched the great pans swing together. There was now no escape for the boat. The strong probability was that she would be crushed to splinters by the crowding of the ice; that indeed she had already been crushed; that the men were either drowned or cast away on the floe.

At once the lad's duty was plain to him. He must stay where he was. If his father and Bill Watt managed to get to the edge of the ice afoot, who else was to take them off?

The ice was moving out to sea, Billy knew. The pans were crunching, grinding, ever more noisily. But he let the punt drift as near as he dared, and so followed the pack towards the open, keeping watch, ever more hopelessly, for the black forms of the two men.

Soon, so fast did the sea rise, so wild was the

wind, his own danger was very great. The ice was like a rocky shore to leeward. He began to fear that he would be wrecked.

Time and again the punt was nearly swamped, but Billy dared not drop the oars to bail. There was something more. His arms, stout and seasoned though they were, were giving out. It would not long be possible to keep the boat off the ice. He determined to land on the floe.

But the sea was breaking on the ice dead to leeward. It was impossible to make a landing there, so with great caution he paddled to the right, seeking a projecting point, behind which he might find shelter. At last he came to a cove. It narrowed to a long, winding arm, which apparently extended some distance into the floe.

There he found quiet water. He landed without difficulty at a point where the arm was no more than a few yards wide. Dusk was then approaching. The wind was bitterly cold, and the snow was thick and blinding.

It would not be safe, he knew, to leave the boat in the water, for at any moment the shifting pans might close and crush it. He tried to lift it out of the water, but his strength was not suf-

ficient. He managed to get the bow on the ice; that was all.

"I'll just have to leave it," he thought. "I'll just have to trust that 'twill not be nipped."

Near by there was a hummock of ice. He sought the lee of it, and there, protected from the wind, he sat down to wait.

Often, when the men were spinning yarns in the cottages of Ruddy Cove of a winter night, he had listened, open-mouthed, to the tales of seal-hunters who had been cast away. Now he was himself drifting out to sea. He had no fire, no food, no shelter but a hummock of ice. He had the bitterness of the night to pass through —the hunger of to-morrow to face.

"But sure," he muttered, with characteristic hopefulness, "I've a boat, an' many a man has been cast away without one."

He thought he had better make another effort to haul the boat on the ice. Some movement of the pack might close the arm where it floated So he stumbled towards the place.

He stared round in amazement and alarm; then he uttered a cry of terror. The open water had disappeared.

"She's been nipped!" he sobbed. "She's

been nipped—nipped to splinters! I've lost meself!"

Night came fast. An hour before, so dense was the storm, nothing had been visible sixty paces away; now nothing was to be seen anywhere. Where was the rodney? Had his father and Bill Watt escaped from the floe by some new opening? Were they safe at home? Were they still on the floe? He called their names. The swish of the storm, the cracking and crunching of the ice as the wind swept it on—that was all that he heard.

For a long time he sat in dull despair. He hoped no longer.

By and by, when it was deep night, something occurred to distract him. He caught sight of a crimson glow, flaring and fading. It seemed to be in the sky, now far off, now near at hand. He started up.

"What's that?" he muttered.

CHAPTER IX

In Which Old Tom Topsail Burns His Punt and Billy Wanders in the Night and Three Lives Hang on a Change of the Wind

MEANWHILE, under the powerful strokes of old Tom Topsail and Bill Watt, the rodney had followed the open leads into the heart of the floe. From time to time Watt muttered a warning; but the spirit of the hunt fully possessed Tom, and his only cry was, "Push on! Push on!"

Seal after seal escaped, while the sky darkened. He was only the more determined not to go back empty-handed.

"I tells you," Watt objected, "we'll not get out. There's the wind now. And snow, man—snow!"

The warning was not to be disregarded. Topsail thought no more about seals. The storm was fairly upon them. His only concern was to escape from the floe. He was glad, indeed, that Billy had not followed them. He had that, at least, to be thankful for.

They turned the boat. Bending to the oars, they followed the lane by which they had entered. Confusion came with the wind and the snow. The lay of the pans seemed to have changed. It was changing every moment, as they perceived.

"Tom," gasped Watt, at last, "we're caught! 'Tis a blind lead we're in."

That was true; the lane had closed. They must seek another exit. So they turned the boat and followed the next lane that opened. It, too, was blocked.

They tried another, selected at random. In that blinding storm no choice was possible. Again disappointment; the lane narrowed to a point. They were nearly exhausted now, but they turned instantly to seek another way. That way was not to be found. The lane had closed behind them.

"Trapped!" muttered Watt.

"Aye, lad," Topsail said, solemnly, "trapped!"

They rested on their oars. Ice was on every hand. They stared into each other's eyes.

Then, for the second time, Watt ran his glance over the shores of the lake in which they floated.

He started, then pointed in the direction from which they had come. Topsail needed no word of explanation. The ice was closing in. The pressure of the pack beyond would soon obliterate the lake. They rowed desperately for the nearest shore.

The ice was rapidly closing in. In such cases, as they knew, it often closed with a sudden rush at the end, crushing some pan which for a moment had held it in check.

When the boat struck the ice Watt jumped ashore with the painter. Topsail, leaping from seat to seat, followed instantly. At that moment there was a loud crack, like a clap of thunder. It was followed by a crunching noise.

"It's comin'!" screamed Topsail.

"Heave away!"

They caught the bow, lifted it out of the water, and with a united effort slowly hauled it out of harm's way. A moment later there was no sign of open water.

"Thank God!" gasped Topsail.

By this time the storm was a blizzard. The men had no shelter, and they were afraid to venture far from the boat in search of it. Neither

would permit the other to stumble over the rough ice, chancing its pitfalls, for neither cared to be lost from the other.

Now they sat silent in the lee of the upturned boat, with the snow swirling about them; again they ran madly back and forth; yet again they swung their arms and stamped their feet. At last, do what they would, they shivered all the time. Then they sat quietly down.

"I'm wonderful glad Billy is safe home," Watt observed.

"I wisht I was sure o' that," said Topsail. "It looks bad for us, Bill, lad. The ice is drivin' out fast, an' I'm thinkin' 'twill blow steady for a day. It looks wonderful bad for us, an' I'd feel —easier in me mind—about the lad's mother— if I knowed he was safe home."

Late in the night Topsail turned to Watt. He had to nudge him to get his attention. "It's awful cold, Bill," he said. "We got the boat, lad. Eh? We got the boat."

"No, no, Tom! Not yet! We'd be sure doomed without the boat."

Half an hour passed. Again Topsail roused Watt.

"We're doomed if we don't," he said. "We

can't stand it till mornin', lad. We can't wait no longer."

Watt blundered to his feet. Without a word he fumbled in the snow until he found what he sought. It was the axe. He handed it to Topsail.

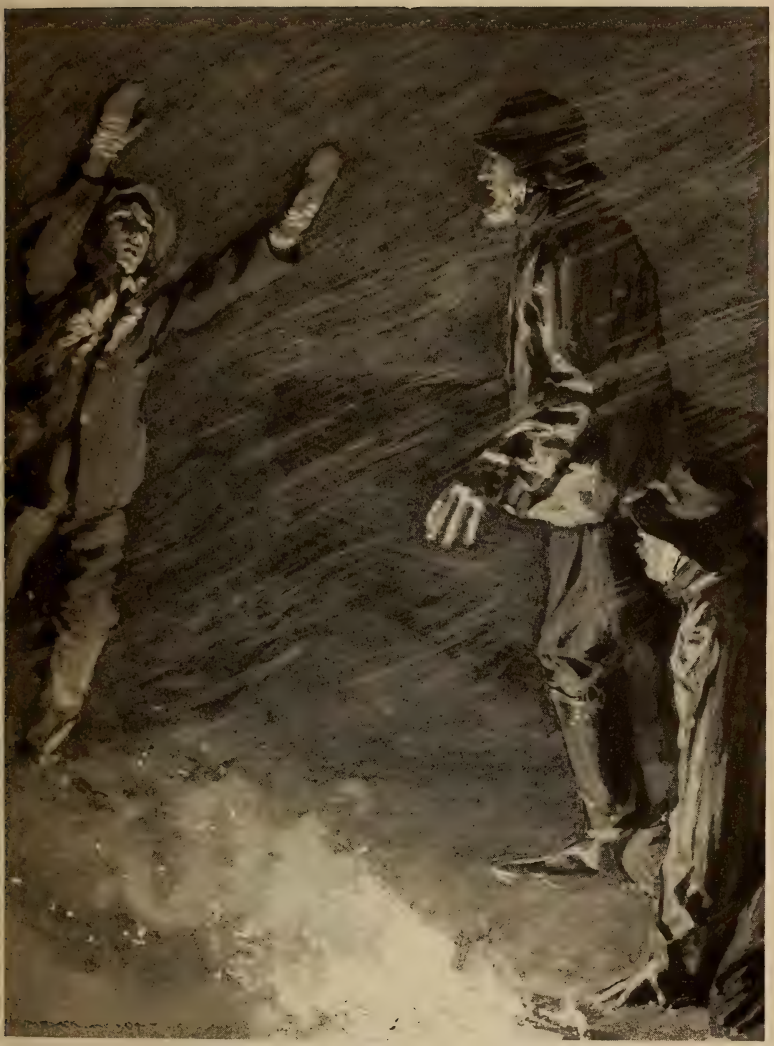
"Do it, Tom!" he said, thickly. "I'm near gone."

Topsail attacked the boat. It was like murder, he thought. He struck blow after blow, blindly, viciously; gathered the splinters, made a little heap of them and set them afire. The fire blazed brightly. Soon it was roaring. The ice all around was lighted up. Above, the snow reflected the lurid glow.

Warmth and a cheerful light put life in the men. They crept as close to the fire as they could. Reason would shut out hope altogether, but hope came to them. Might not the storm abate? Might not the wind change? Might not they be picked up? In this strain they talked for a long time; and meanwhile they added the fuel, splinter by splinter.

"Father! 'Tis *you!*"

Topsail leaped to his feet and stared.



BILLY STAGGERED INTO THE CIRCLE OF LIGHT.

"'Tis Billy!" cried Watt.

Billy staggered into the circle of light. He stared stupidly at the fire. Then he tottered a step or two nearer, and stood swaying; and again he stared at the fire in a stupid way.

"I seed the fire!" he mumbled. "The punt's nipped, sir—an' I seed the fire—an' crawled over the ice. 'Twas hard to find you."

Tom Topsail and Bill Watt understood. They, too, had travelled rough ice in a blizzard, and they understood.

Billy was wet to the waist. That meant that, blinded by the snow or deceived by the night, he had slipped through some opening in the ice, some crack or hole. The bare thought of that lonely peril was enough to make the older men shudder. But they asked him no questions. They led him to the fire, prodigally replenished it, and sat him down between them. By and by he was so far recovered that he was able to support his father's argument that the wind had not changed.

"Oh, well," replied Watt, doggedly, "you can say what you likes; but I tells you that the wind's veered to the south. 'Twould not sur-

prise me if the pack was drivin' Cape Wonder way."

"No, no, Bill," said Topsail sadly; "there's been no change. We're drivin straight out. When the wind drops the pack'll go to pieces, an' then ——"

Thus the argument was continued, intermittently, until near dawn. Of a sudden, then, they heard a low, far-off rumble. It was a significant, terrifying noise. It ran towards them, increasing in volume. It was like the bumping that runs through a freight-train when the engine comes to a sudden stop.

The pack trembled. There was then a fearful confusion of grinding, crashing sounds. Everywhere the ice was heaving and turning. The smaller pans were crushed; many of the greater ones were forced on end; some were lifted bodily out of the water, and fell back in fragments, broken by their own weight. On all sides were noise and awful upheaval. The great pan upon which the seal-hunters had landed was tipped up—up—up—until it was like the side of a steep hill. There it rested. Then came silence.

Bill Watt was right: the wind had changed; the pack had grounded on Cape Wonder. The three men from Ruddy Cove walked ashore in the morning.

Billy was the first to run up to the house. He went through the door like a gale of wind.

"We're safe, mother!" he shouted.

"I'm glad, dear," said his mother, quietly. "Breakfast is ready."

When Billy was older he learned the trick his mother had long ago mastered—to betray no excitement, whatever the situation.

CHAPTER X

How Billy Topsail's Friend Bobby Lot Joined Fortunes With Eli Zitt and Whether or Not he Proved Worthy of the Partnership

RUDDY COVE called Eli Zitt a "hard" man. In Newfoundland, that means "hardy"—not "bad." Eli was gruff-voiced, lowering-eyed, unkempt, big; he could swim with the dogs, outdare all the reckless spirits of the Cove with the punt in a gale, bare his broad breast to the winter winds, travel the ice wet or dry, shoulder a barrel of flour; he was a sturdy, fearless giant, was Eli Zitt, of Ruddy Cove. And for this the Cove very properly called him a "hard" man.

When Josiah Lot, his partner, put out to sea and never came back—an offshore gale had the guilt of that deed—Eli scowled more than ever and said a deal less.

"He'll be feelin' bad about Josiah," said the Cove.

Which may have been true. However, Eli took care of Josiah's widow and son. The son

was Bobby Lot, with whom, subsequently, Billy Topsail shared the adventure of the giant squid of Chain Tickle. The Cove laughed with delight to observe Eli Zitt's attachment to the lad. The big fellow seemed to be quite unable to pass the child without patting him on the back; and sometimes, so exuberant was his affection, the pats were of such a character that Bobby lost his breath. Whereupon, Eli would chuckle the harder, mutter odd endearments, and stride off on his way.

"He'll be likin' that lad pretty well," said the Cove. "Nar a doubt, they'll be partners."

And it came to pass as the Cove surmised; but much sooner than the Cove expected. Josiah Lot's widow died when Bobby was eleven years old. When the little gathering at the graveyard in the shelter of Great Hill dispersed, Eli took the lad out in the punt—far out to the quiet fishing grounds, where they could be alone. It was a glowing evening—red and gold in the western sky. The sea was heaving gently, and the face of the waters was unruffled.

"Bobby, b'y!" Eli whispered. "Bobby, lad! Does you hear me? Don't cry no more!"

"Ay, Eli," sobbed Bobby. "I'll cry no more."

But he kept on crying, just the same, for he could not stop; and Eli looked away—very quickly—to the glowing sunset clouds. Can't *you* tell why?

"Bobby," he said, turning, at last, to the lad, "us'll be partners—you an' me."

Bobby sobbed harder than ever.

"Won't us, lad?"

Eli laid his great hand on Bobby's shoulder. Then Bobby took his fists out of his eyes and looked up into Eli's compassionate face.

"Ay, Eli," he said, "'us'll be partners—jus' you an' me."

From that out, they *were* partners; and Bobby Lot was known in the Cove as the foster son of Eli Zitt. They lived together in Eli's cottage by the tickle cove, where Eli had lived alone, since, many years before, *his* mother had left *him* to face the world for himself. The salmon net, the herring seine, the punt, the flake, the stage—these they held in common; and they went to the grounds together, where they fished the long days through, good friends, good partners. The Cove said that they were very happy; and, as always, the Cove was right.

One night Eli came ashore from a trading

schooner that had put in in the morning, smiling broadly as he entered the kitchen. He laid his hand on the table, palm down.

"They's a gift for you under that paw, lad," he said.

"For me, Eli!" cried Bobby.

"Ay, lad—for my partner!"

Bobby stared curiously at the big hand. He wondered what it covered. "What is it, Eli?" he asked. "Come, show me!"

Eli lifted the hand, and gazed at Bobby, grinning, the while, with delight. It was a jack-knife—a stout knife, three-bladed, horn-handled, big, serviceable; just the knife for a fisher lad. Bobby picked it up, but said never a word, for his delight overcame him.

"You're wonderful good t' me, Eli," he said, at last looking up with glistening eyes. "You're *wonderful* good t' me!"

Eli put his arm around the boy. "You're a good partner, lad," he said. "You're a wonderful good partner!"

Bobby was proud of that.

They put the salmon net out in the spring. The ice was still lingering offshore. The west

wind carried it out; the east wind swept it in: variable winds kept pans and bergs drifting hither and thither, and no man could tell where next the ice would go. Now, the sea was clear, from the shore to the jagged, glistening white line, off near the horizon; next day—the day after—and the pack was grinding against the coast rocks. Men had to keep watch to save the nets from destruction.

The partners' net was moored off Break-heart Point. It was a good berth, but a rough one; when the wind was in the northeast, the waters off the point were choppy and covered with sheets of foam from the breakers.

"'Tis too rough t' haul the salmon net," said Eli, one day. "I'll be goin' over the hills for a sack o' flour. An' you'll be a good b'y 'til I gets back?"

"Oh, ay, sir!" said Bobby Lot.

It was a rough day: the wind was blowing from the north, a freshening, gusty breeze, cold and misty; off to sea, the sky was leaden, threatening, and overhead dark clouds were driving low and swift with the wind; the water was choppy—rippling black under the squalls. The ice was drifting alongshore, well out from the

coast ; there was a berg and the wreck of a berg of Arctic ice and many a pan from the bays and harbours of the coast.

With the wind continuing in the north, the ice would drift harmlessly past. But the wind changed. In the afternoon it freshened and veered to the east. At four o'clock it was half a gale, blowing inshore.

"I'll just be goin' out the tickle t' have a look at that ice," thought Bobby. "'Tis like it'll come ashore."

He looked the punt over very carefully before setting out. It was wise, he thought, to prepare to take her out into the gale, whether or not he must go. He saw to it that the thole-pins were tight and strong, that the bail-bucket was in its place, that the running gear was fit for heavy strain. The wind was then fluttering the harbour water and screaming on the hilltops ; and he could hear the sea breaking on the tickle rocks. He rowed down the harbour to the mouth of the tickle, whence he commanded a view of the coast, north and south.

The ice was drifting towards Break-heart Point. It would destroy the salmon net within the hour, he perceived—sweep over it, tear it

from its moorings, bruise it against the rocks. Bobby knew, in a moment, that his duty was to put out from the sheltered harbour to the wind-swept, breaking open, where the spume was flying and the heave and fret of the sea threatened destruction to the little punt. Were he true man and good partner he would save the net!

"He've been good t' me," he thought. "Ay, Eli 've been wonderful good t' me. I'll be true partner t' him!"

CHAPTER XI

Bobby Lot Learns to Swim and Eli Zitt Shows Amazing Courage and Self-possession and Strength

WHEN, returning over the hills, Eli Zitt came to the Knob o' Break-heart, he saw his own punt staggering through the gray waves towards the net off the point—tossing with the sea and reeling under the gusty wind—with his little partner in the stern. The boat was between the ice and the breakers. The space of open water was fast narrowing; only a few minutes more and the ice would strike the rocks. Eli dropped on his knees, then and there, and prayed God to save the lad.

"O Lard, save my lad!" he cried. "O Lard, save my wee lad!"

He saw the punt draw near the first mooring; saw Bobby loose the sheet, and let the brown sail flutter like a flag in the wind; saw him leap to the bow, and lean over, with a knife in his hand, while the boat tossed in the lop, shipping water every moment; saw him stagger amidships, bail

like mad, snatch up the oars, pull to the second mooring and cut the last net-rope ; saw him leap from seat to seat to the stern, grasp the tiller, haul taut the sheet, and stand off to the open sea.

" Clever Bobby ! " he screamed, wildly excited. " Clever lad ! My partner, my little partner ! "

But the wind carried the cry away. Bobby did not hear—did not know, even, that his partner had been a spectator of his brave faithfulness. He was beating out, to make sea-room for the run with the wind to harbour ; and the boat was dipping her gunwale in a way that kept every faculty alert to keep her afloat. Eli watched him until he rounded and stood in for the tickle. Then the man sighed happily and went home.

" Us'll grapple for that net the morrow," he said, when Bobby came in.

Bobby opened his eyes. " Aye ? " he said. " 'Tis safe on the bottom. I thought I'd best cut it adrift t' save it."

" I seed you," said Eli, " from the Knob. 'Twas well done, lad ! You're a true partner."

" The knife come in handy," said Bobby, smiling. " 'Tis a good knife."

"Aye," said Eli, with a shake of the head. "I bought un for a good one."

And that was all.

Eli set about rearing young Bobby in a fashion as wise as he knew. He exposed the lad to wet and weather, as judiciously as he could, to make him hardy; he took him to sea in high winds, to fix his courage and teach him to sail; he taught him the weather signs, the fish-lore of the coast, the "marks" for the fishing grounds, the whereabouts of shallows and reefs and currents; he took him to church and sent him to Sunday-school. And he taught him to swim.

On the fine days of that summer, when there were no fish to be caught, the man and the lad went together to the Wash-tub—a deep, little cove of the sea, clear, quiet, bottomed with smooth rock and sheltered from the wind by high cliffs; but cold—almost as cold as ice-water. Here Bobby delighted to watch Eli dive, leap from the cliff, float on his back, swim far out to sea; here he gazed with admiration on the man's rugged body—broad shoulders, bulging muscles, great arms and legs. And here, too, he learned to swim.

When the warmest summer days were gone, Bobby could paddle about the Wash-tub in promising fashion. He was confident when Eli was at hand—sure, then, that he could keep afloat. But he was not yet sure enough of his power when Eli had gone on the long swim to sea. Eli said that he had done well; and Bobby, himself, often said that he could swim a deal better than a stone. In an emergency, both agreed, Bobby's new accomplishment would be sure to serve him well.

"Sure, if the punt turned over," Bobby innocently boasted, "I'd be able t' swim 'til you righted her."

That was to be proved.

"Eli, b'y," said old James Blunt, one day in the fall of the year, "do you take my new dory t' the grounds t'-day. Sure, I'd like t' know how you likes it."

Old James had built his boat after a south-coast model. She was a dory, a flat-bottomed craft, as distinguished from a punt, which has a round bottom and keel. He was proud of her, but somewhat timid; and he wanted Eli's opinion of her quality.

"'Tis a queer lookin' thing!" said Eli. "But me an' my partner'll try she, James, just for luck."

That afternoon a fall gale caught the dory on the Farthest Grounds—far out beyond the Wolf's Teeth Reef. It came from the shore so suddenly that Eli could not escape it. So it was a beat to harbour, with the wind and sea rising fast. Off the Valley, which is half a mile from the narrows, a gust came out between the hills—came strong and swift. It heeled the dory over—still over—down—down until the water poured in over the gunwale. Eli let go the main-sheet, expecting the sail to fall away from the wind and thus ease the boat. But the line caught in the block. Down went the dory—still down. And of a sudden it capsized.

When Bobby came to the surface, he began frantically to splash the water, momentarily losing strength, breath and self-possession. Eli was waiting for him, with head and shoulders out of the water, like an eager dog as he waits for the stick his master is about to throw. He swam close; but hung off for a moment—until, indeed, he perceived that Bobby would never of himself regain his self-possession—for he did not want

the boy to be too soon beholden to him for aid. Then he slipped his hand under Bobby's breast and buoyed him up.

"Partner!" he said, quietly. "Partner!"

Bobby's panic-stricken struggles at once ceased; for he had been used to giving instant obedience to Eli's commands. He looked in Eli's dripping face.

"Easy, partner," said Eli, still quietly. "Strike out, now."

Bobby smiled, and struck out, as directed. In a moment he was swimming at Eli's side.

"Take it easy, lad," Eli continued. "Just take it easy while I rights the boat. It's all right. I'll have you aboard in a jiffy. Is you—is you—all right, Bobby?"

"Aye," Bobby gasped.

Eli waited for a moment longer. He was loath to leave the boy to take care of himself. Until then he had not known how large a place in his heart his little partner filled, how much he had come to depend upon him for all those things which make life worth while. He had not known, indeed, how far away from the old, lonely life the lad had led him. So he waited for a moment longer, watching Bobby. Then he

swam to the overturned dory, where, after an anxious glance towards the lad, he dived to cut away the gear—and dived again, and yet again; watching Bobby all the time he was at the surface for breath.

The gear cut away, the mast pulled from its socket, Eli righted the boat. It takes a strong man and clever swimmer to do that; but Eli was clever in the water, and strong anywhere. Moreover, it was a trick he had learned.

"Come, Bobby, b'y!" he called.

Bobby swam towards the boat. Eli swam to meet him, and helped him over the last few yards of choppy sea, for the lad was almost exhausted. Bobby laid a hand on the bow of the dory. Then Eli pulled off one of his long boots, and swam to the stern, where he began cautiously to bail the boat. When she was light enough in the water, he helped Bobby aboard, and Bobby bailed her dry.

"Ha, lad!" Eli ejaculated, with a grin that made his face shine. "You is safe aboard. How is you, b'y?"

"Tired, Eli," Bobby answered.

"You bide quiet where you is," said Eli. "I'll find the paddles; an' I'll soon have you home."

Eli's great concern had been to get the boy out of the water. He had cared for little else than that—to get him out of the reach of the sea. And now he was confronted by the problem of making harbour. The boat was slowly drifting out with the wind; the dusk was approaching; and every moment it was growing more difficult to swim in the choppy sea. It took him a long time to find the paddles.

"Steady the boat, Bobby," he said, when the boy had taken the paddles into the dory. "I'm comin' aboard."

Eli attempted to board the dory over the bow. She was tossing about in a choppy sea; and he was not used to her ways. Had she been a punt—his punt—he would have been aboard in a trice. But she was not his punt—not a punt, at all; she was a new boat, a dory, a flat-bottomed craft; he was not used to her ways. Bobby tried desperately to steady her while Eli lifted himself out of the water.

"Take care, Eli!" he screamed. "She'll be over!"

Eli got his knee on the gunwale—no more than that. A wave tipped the boat; she lurched; she capsized. And again Eli waited for Bobby

to come to the surface of the water; again buoyed him up; again gave him courage; again helped him to the boat; again bailed the boat—this time with one of Bobby's boots—and again helped Bobby aboard.

"I'm wonderful tired, Eli," said Bobby, when the paddles were handed over the side for the second time. "I'm fair' done out."

"'Twill be over soon, lad. I'll have you home by the kitchen fire in half an hour. Come, now, partner! Steady the boat. I'll try again."

Even more cautiously Eli attempted to clamber aboard. Inch by inch he raised himself out of the water. When the greater waves ran under the boat, he paused; when she rode on an even keel, he came faster. Inch by inch, humouring the cranky boat all the time, he lifted his right leg. But he could not get aboard. Again, when his knee was on the gunwale, the dory capsized.

For the third time the little partner was helped aboard and given a boot with which to bail. His strength was then near gone. He threw water over the side until he could no longer lift his arms.

"Eli," he gasped, "I can do no more!"

Eli put his hand on the bow, as though about to attempt to clamber aboard again. But he withdrew it.

"Bobby, b'y," he said, "could you not manage t' pull a bit with the paddles. I'll swim alongside."

Bobby stared stupidly at him.

Again Eli put his hand on the bow. He was in terror of losing Bobby's life. Never before had he known such dread and fear. He did not dare risk overturning the boat again; for he knew that Bobby would not survive for the fourth time. What could he do? He could not get aboard, and Bobby could not row. How was he to get the boy ashore? His hand touched the painter—the long rope by which the boat was moored to the stage. That gave him an idea: he would tow the boat ashore!

So he took the rope in his teeth, and struck out for the tickle to the harbour!

"'Twas a close call, b'y," said Eli, when he and Bobby sat by the kitchen fire.

"Ay, Eli; 'twas a close call."

"A *wonderful* close call!" Eli repeated, grinning. "The closest I ever knowed."

"An' 'twas too bad," said Bobby, "t' lose the gear."

Eli laughed.

"What you laughin' at?" Bobby asked.

"I brought ashore something better than the gear."

"The dory?"

"No, b'y!" Eli roared. "My little partner!"

CHAPTER XII

Containing the Surprising Adventure of Eli Zitt's Little Partner on the Way Back from Fortune Harbour, in Which a Newfoundland Dog Displays a Saving Intelligence

BOBBY LOT, Eli Zitt's little partner, left his dog at home when he set out for Fortune Harbour in Eli's punt. He thought it better for the dog. He liked company, well enough, did Bobby; but he loved his dog. Why expose the lazy, fat, old fellow, with his shaky legs and broken teeth, to an attack in force by the pack of a strange harbour?

The old dog's fighting days were over. He had been a mighty, masterful beast in his prime; and he had scarred too many generations of the Ruddy Cove pack to be molested now as he waddled about the roads and coves where his strength and courage had been proved. But the dogs of Fortune Harbour knew nothing of the deeds he had done; and an air of dignity, a snarl and a show of yellow teeth would not be sufficient to discourage the yelping onset.

"They'd kill him," thought the master.

So the lad determined to leave his dog at home, and it was well for him that he did.

"Go back, Bruce!" he cried, as he pushed out from Eli Zitt's wharf-head.

But Bruce slipped into the water from the rocks, and swam after the boat, a beseeching look in the eyes which age had glazed and shot with blood. He was not used to being left at home when Bobby pushed out in the punt.

"Go home, b'y!" cried Bobby, lifting an oar.

The threatening gesture was too much for Bruce. He raised himself in the water and whined, then wheeled about and paddled for shore.

"Good dog!" Bobby called after him.

In response, the water in the wake of the dog was violently agitated. He was wagging his tail. Thus he signified a cheerful acquiescence.

"He'll be wonderin' why he've been sent back," thought Bobby. "'Tis too bad we can't tell dogs things like that."

Bobby had a message for Sammy Tompkins. It was about the great run of cod at Good Luck Tickles, the news of which had reached Ruddy Cove that morning. But old Sammy was on the

Black Fly fishing grounds when the lad got to Fortune Harbour. It was growing dark when he got in for the night. So Bobby chanced to be late starting home.

The wind had fallen away to a breathless calm; the sky was thickly overcast, and a thin mist lay between the gloomy clouds and the sea's long, black ground-swell. Bobby had not pulled through four of the six miles before sea and sky and rocky coast were melted into one vast, deep shadow, except where, near at hand, the bolder headlands were to be distinguished by one who knew them well.

"I wonder," Bobby thought, "if I'll get home before mornin'. 'Tis hard t' say. I might have t' lie out here all night. Sure, I hope it gets no thicker."

He rowed on towards Ruddy Cove, taking new bearings from time to time as the deeper shadows of the headlands loomed out of the dark of the night. Thus, he followed the coast, making with great caution for the narrow entrance to the inner harbour, which invariably was hard to find at night or in the fog.

The sea was breaking against the rocks. The noise was loud in Bobby's ears, and served to

guide him at such times as the headlands were indistinguishable from the clouds. His progress was slow and cautious; for he knew the dangers of the way he must take.

There was a line of submerged rocks—The Wrecker, Old Moll and Deep Down—lying out from Iron Head, directly in his path. That neighbourhood was a neighbourhood of danger. When the lad caught sight of the strange outline of Iron Head, he swerved the bow of the boat to sea and paddled out. He wanted to make sure of rounding Deep Down, the outermost rock—of giving it a wide berth.

But the night and the noise of the breakers confused him. He could not tell whether or not he had gone far enough. At length he decided that he must be safely beyond the rock. But where was Deep Down? Often he paused to turn and look ahead. Every glance he cast was more anxious than the one before. He was getting nervous.

"'Tis hard t' tell if the sea is breakin' on Deep Down," he said to himself. "Sure, it must be, though."

It was important to know that. Sometimes only the larger swells curl and break as they roll

over Deep Down. Bobby knew that just such a sea was running then. Had it been daylight, the green colour and the slight lifting of the water would have warned him of the whereabouts of that dangerous reef. But it was night; the spray, as the wave was broken and flung into the air, and the swish and the patter, as the water fell back, were the signs he was on the lookout for.

If, then, the waves broke only at long intervals, the punt might at any moment be lifted and overturned. It might even then be floating over the rock. Bobby's heart beat faster when the greater swells slipped under the boat. Would they break beneath him? Would they break near at hand? He paddled slowly. It was better to be cautious, he thought, until he had Deep Down located. So he listened and looked as he paddled on.

At last he heard the significant swish and patter. He flashed about to look ahead. But he was too late. The spray had fallen and disappeared.

"'Tis somewheres near," he thought, "and 'tis breakin'. But whether t' port or starboard, I don't know."

Again—and apparently from another quarter —he heard the noise of a breaking wave. He turned in time to catch sight of a gleam of phosphorescence off the port bow.

"If that's Deep Down," he thought, "I'm safe. But if 'tis Old Moll or The Wrecker, I'm somewheres over Deep Down. I wisht I knowed which it was."

What was it? The Wrecker, Old Moll or Deep Down? Which one of the three rocks that lay in a line off Iron Head?

"I wisht I knowed," Bobby muttered, as he bent anew to the oars.

In the meantime, old Sol Sludge, of Becky Sharpe's cove, which lies beyond Iron Head, had started for Ruddy Cove by the goat paths to tell Skipper John Matthews that he would take a berth in the schooner *Rescue* when she got back from the Labrador.

He had a candle-lantern to light the way. When he had crossed the Head and was bound down the valley to meet the Ruddy Cove road, he heard a cry for help. It came from the sea, with a soft southwest wind which had sprung up —a sharp "Help! Help!" ringing out of the

darkness again and again. Old Sol listened stupidly, until, as from exhaustion, the cries turned hoarse and weak.

"Now, I wonder who's out there," the dull old fellow thought. "It sounded like a woman's voice. Sure, it may be the spirit o' Mary Rutt. She was drowned off Iron Head."

Nevertheless, he made haste to Ruddy Cove—all the haste his old legs and dim sight would permit—and told the folk that he had heard the cry of a spirit drift in from the sea off Iron Head. But nobody believed that.

Who was in the water off Iron Head? was the question that passed from cottage to cottage. Was it Billy Topsail? No; for Billy told the folk in person that he had come in from the grounds at twilight. Was it Josiah Seaworthy? No; for Josiah's wife said that he had gone by way of Crooked Tickle to Burnt Harbour.

Who was it? Had Eli Zitt's little partner got back from Fortune Harbour? When Eli Zitt heard of that cry for help he knew that Bobby's punt had been overturned on one of the Iron Head rocks. Like a woman's voice? That surely was Bobby's—that clear, full voice. So

he called for a crew to man the skiff, and in five minutes he was ready to push off.

Old Bruce jumped aboard.

"Get out with you!" said Bill Watt, aiming a kick at him by the light of the lantern.

"Sc-ctt!" cried old Tom Topsail.

But Bruce was a practiced stowaway. He slunk forward, and found a refuge under the bow seat.

"Push off, lads!" Eli shouted. "Give way!"

In ten minutes the skiff had passed from the harbour to the sea. Eli Zitt, who worked the scull oar, turned her bow towards the Iron Head rocks. It was dark; but he had fished those waters from boyhood, and he knew the way, daylight or dark.

Dark it was, indeed! How was Bobby to be found in that great shadow? He was a waterdog, was Bobby; but there was a limit to his endurance, and half an hour at least had passed since old Sol Sludge had heard his cry for help.

A long search meant failure. He must be found soon or he would not be found at all. On went the boat, the water curling from her bows and swirling in her wake. The phosphorescence flashed and glowed as the oars were struck deep and lifted.

"He'll be swimmin' in," Bill Watt panted, when the skiff had covered half the distance to Deep Down. "They's no place for him t' land with this sea on. We ought t' meet him hereabouts."

"If he's afloat," Topsail added.

"Oh, he's afloat yet," Eli said, confidently. "He's a strong swimmer, that lad is."

"I'm thinkin' he'll be nearer shore," said Bill Watt.

"No, no! He's further out an' on."

"Bobby!" Topsail shouted. "Oh, Bobby!"

There was no reply. For a moment the rowers lifted their oars from the water. Silence was all about—from the boat to the shore rocks, where the waves were breaking. The cries for help had ceased.

"Gone down," Bill Watt muttered.

The men gave way again. Again they paused to call Bobby's name, and to listen, with anxious hearts, for some far-off, answering cry. Again they gave way. Again they called and called, but heard no answer.

"Gone down," Bill Watt repeated.

"Give way, lads!" cried Eli. "He's further out."

Old Bruce came out from hiding. He crawled to the stern seat and sniffed to windward. Then, with his nose pointed astern, he began to howl.

"Shut up, you!" Topsail exclaimed.

But Bruce could not be quieted—not even after Topsail's boot had caught him in the side and brought a sharp howl of pain. Still he sniffed to windward and barked.

"Throw him over," said Bill Watt. "We'll not be able t' hear Bobby."

"Oh, if 'twas only light!" Eli groaned, not heeding Watt.

But it was dark. The water was covered with deepest shadow. Only the breakers and the black outline of Iron Head could be seen. Bobby might be swimming near at hand but too far off to send an audible shout for help.

"Bobby—oh—Bobby!"

If a cry in answer had gone up, the barking of the dog drowned it. The dog must be quieted.

"Push the brute over!" said Watt.

Watt himself dropped his oar and stepped to the stern. He took Bruce unaware and tumbled him into the water. The old dog made no protest. He whined eagerly and swam out from the boat—a straight course astern.

"Now, what did he do that for?" mused Watt.

"That's queer," said Topsail.

Eli looked deep into the night. The dog left a luminous wake. Beyond, in the direction the dog had taken, the man caught sight of a phosphorescent glow. Watt saw it at the same moment.

"What's that?" said he. "They's fiery water, back there!"

"Man," cried Eli, "the dog knowed! Sure, it must be Bobby, swimmin' up, an' too beat out t' cry. Fetch her about, lads. We're on the wrong course. Haste! He'll not be able t' last much longer."

Eli was right. The dog *had* known. It was Bobby. When they picked him up he was too much exhausted to speak. It was afterwards learned that he had mistaken the spray of the Old Moll breaker for Deep Down and had been turned over by the outer rock when he thought himself safe. He had heard the call of his name, and had seen the lantern of the rescuing skiff, as it drew near; but, long before, he had worn his voice out with screaming for help, and could make no answer. He had heard the barking of

Bruce, too ; had known its significance, and had wondered whether or not the dog would be understood. But all that he could say, when they lifted him aboard—and that in a hoarse, weak whisper—was :

" Bruce ! "

At that moment the crew heard a piteous whine near at hand. It was Bill Watt who pulled the exhausted old dog over the gunwale.

" Good dog ! " said he.

And so said they all.

CHAPTER XIII

In Which Billy Topsail Sets Sail for the Labrador, the Rescue Strikes an Iceberg, and Billy is Commanded to Pump for His Life

IT was early in the spring—a time of changeable weather when, in the northern seas, the peril of drift-ice, bergs, snow, wind and the dark must sometimes be met with short warning. The schooner *Rescue*, seventy tons, Job Small, master, had supplied the half-starved Labrador fishermen with flour and pork, and was bound back to Ruddy Cove, in ballast, to load provisions and shop goods for the straits trade.

Billy Topsail was aboard. "I 'low, dad," he had said to his father, when the skipper of the *Rescue* received the Government commission to proceed North with supplies, "that I'd like t' *see* the Labrador."

"You'll see it many a time, lad," his father had replied, "afore you're done with it."

"An' Skipper Job," Billy had persisted, "says he'll take me."

The end of it was that Billy was shipped.

The *Rescue* had rounded the cape at dawn, with all sails set, even to her topmast-staysail, which the Newfoundlanders call the "Tommy Dancer"; but now, with the night coming down, she was laboriously beating into a head wind under jib and reefed mainsail.

"I'm fair ashamed t' have the canvas off her," said Skipper Job, after a long look to windward. "'Tis no more than a switch, an' we're clewed up for a snorter."

"They's no one t' see, sir," said the cook. "That's good; an' sure I hopes that nothin' heaves in sight t' shame us."

"Leave us shake the reef out o' the mains'l, sir, an' give her the fores'l," said the first hand.

"We're not in haste, b'y," the skipper replied. "She's doin' well as she is. We'll not make harbour this night, an' I've no mind t' be in the neighbourhood o' the Break-heart Rocks afore mornin'. Let her bide."

The weather thickened. With the night came a storm of snow in heavy flakes, which the wind swept over the deck in clouds. There was nothing to relieve the inky darkness. The schooner reeled forth and back on the port and starboard tacks, beating her way south as blind as a bat.

There was no rest for the crew. The skipper was at the wheel, the first hand on the lookout forward, the cook and the two other hands standing by on deck for emergencies.

So far as the wind, the sea and the drift-ice were concerned, the danger was slight, for the *Rescue* was stoutly built ; but the sea was strewn with vast fields and mountains of Arctic ice,—the glacier icebergs which drift out of the north in the spring—and in their proximity, in their great mass and changing position, lay a dreadful danger.

"Sure, I wisht you could chart icebergs," said the skipper to the cook. "But," he added, anxiously, "you can't. They moves so fast an' so peculiar that—that—well, I wisht they didn't."

"I wisht they wasn't none," said the cook.

"Ay, lad," said the skipper. "But they might be a wonderful big one sixty fathom dead ahead at this minute. We couldn't see it if they was."

"I hopes they isn't, sir," said the cook, with a shiver.

The snow ceased before morning ; but at the peep of dawn a thick fog came up with the wind, and when the light came it added nothing to the

range of vision from the bow. The night had been black; the dawn was gray. It was so thick that the man at the wheel could not see beyond the foremast. The lookout was lost in the fog ahead. Eyes were now of no more use than in the depths of a cloudy night.

But the schooner had weathered the night; and when the first light of day broke in the east, Skipper Job gave the wheel to the second hand, and went below with the cook to have a cup of tea.

"I've no mind t' lose her," said he, "so I'll leave her bowl along under short sail. If we strike, 'twill be so much the easier."

"'Twould be a sad pity t' lose her," said the cook, "when you've got her so near paid for."

"Ay, that's it," said the skipper.

The *Rescue* had been built for young Skipper Job, after Skipper Job's own model, by the Ruddy Cove trader. The trader was to share in the voyages—whether for Labrador fish or in the Shore trade—until she was paid for. Then she would belong to Skipper Job—to the young skipper, who had married the parson's daughter, and now had a boy of his own for whom to plan and dream.

That was the spring of his energy and caution —that little boy, who could no more than toddle over the kitchen floor and gurgle a greeting to the lithe young fellow who bounded up the path to catch him in his arms. The schooner was the fortune of the lad and the mother ; and she was now all so nearly Job's own that another voyage or two—a mere four months—might see the last dollar of the obligation paid over.

" No," Skipper Job repeated, absently, when he had thought of the toddler and the tender, smiling mother, " I've no mind t' lose this here schooner."

Job dreamed of the lad while he sipped his tea. They must make a parson of him, if he had the call, the skipper thought; or a doctor, perhaps. Whatever, that baby must never follow the sea. No, no! He must never know the hardship and anxiety of such a night as that just past. He must be ——

A scream of warning broke into the dream:

" Har-rd-a-lee ! "

Skipper Job heard the fall of the feet of a man leaping back from the bow. There was meaning in the step, in the haste and length of the leaps —the imminence of a collision with the ice.

"All hands!"

The skipper had no more than leaped to his feet when there was a stunning crash overhead, followed on the instant by a shock that stopped the schooner dead and made her quiver from stem to stern. The bowsprit was rammed into the forecastle, the deck planks were ripped up, the upper works of the bows were crushed in, the cook's pots and pans were tumbled about, the lamp was broken and extinguished. Job was thrown from his feet.

When he recovered, it was to the horror of this darkness and confusion—to a second crash and shock, to screams and trampling overhead, and to a rain of blows upon the deck. He cried to the cook to follow him on deck, and felt his way in mad haste to the ladder; but there he stopped, of a sudden, with his foot on the lowest step, for the cook had made no reply.

"Cook, b'y!" he shouted.

There was no answer. It was apparent that the man had been killed or desperately injured. The skipper knew the danger of delay. They had struck ice; the berg might overturn, some massive peak might topple over, the ship might fill and sink. But, as a matter of course, and

with no thought of himself as a hero, he turned and made a groping search for the cook, until he found the poor fellow lying unconscious among his own pots and pans. Thence he carried him to the deck, and stretched him out on the fore hatch, with the foreboom and sail to protect him from the fragments of ice, which fell as in a shower each time the schooner struck the berg.

Billy Topsail caught the skipper by the arm in a strong grip.

"We're lost!" he cried.

The roaring wind, the hiss of the seas, the shock and wreck, the sudden, dreadful peril, had thrown the lad into a panic. The skipper perceived his distress, and acted promptly to restore him to his manhood.

"Leave me free!" he shouted, with a scowl.

But Billy tightened his grip on the skipper's arm, and sobbed and whined. The skipper knocked him down with a blow on the breast; then jerked him to his feet and pointed to the pump.

"Pump for your life!" he commanded, knowing well that what poor Billy needed was work, of whatever kind, to give him back his courage.

CHAPTER XIV

Faithfully Narrating the Amazing Experiences of a Newfoundland Schooner and Describing Billy Topsail's Conduct in a Sinking Boat

THE deck of the *Rescue* was now littered with wreckage and casks. Splinters of the jib-boom, all tangled with the standing rigging, lay upon the forward deck. The maintopmast had snapped off, and hung from the mainmast in a tangle of wire and rope. They had already cut the mainsail halyards, and the big sail lay upon the boom, on the port side, in disarrayed folds.

The bows were high out of the water, as if the ship had run up a steep, submerged shelf of ice; and the seas, which the wind of the night had raised, from time to time broke over the stern. It was impossible, however, to determine the general situation of the schooner. The fog was too thick for that, and the day had not yet fully broken. All that was revealed, in a glance about, was that upon one hand lay a waste of breaking water, and upon the other a dull white mass, lifting itself into the mist.

"'Tis bad, lads," said the skipper, when the first and second hands had joined him under the mainmast shrouds.

"She's lost," said the first.

"We'll be takin' t' the boat," said the second.

"I'm not so sure that she's lost," said the skipper. "Whatever, we'll not take t' the boat till we have to."

The first and second hands exchanged a glance, and together looked at the boat. The swift glance and look were a danger-signal to the skipper.

"Does you hear me?" he shouted, his voice ringing out above the wash of the waves and the noise of the wind. "We'll not leave her. Take a spell at the pump, both o' you!"

For a moment the skipper's authority was in doubt. The men wavered. A repetition of the command, however, with clenched fists ready to enforce it, decided them. They relieved young Billy.

"Is the water gainin', b'y?" said the skipper to the lad.

Billy looked up steadily. The fright had left his eyes. He had recovered his self-possession.

"No, sir," he said, quietly. "'Tis gettin' less all the while."

At that moment the ship lurched slightly and slid off the shelf. The skipper shouted an order to raise the foresail, and ran aft to take the wheel. But the fall of the topmast had so tangled the rigging and jammed the gaff and boom that before the crew could remove the unconscious cook and lift the sail, the wind had turned the schooner and was driving her stern foremost, as it appeared, on the ice.

The skipper, from his station at the wheel, calmly observed the nearing berg, and gave the schooner up for lost. There was no time to raise the sail—no room for beating out of danger. He saw, too, that if she struck with force, the quarter-boat, which was swinging from davits astern, would be crushed to splinters.

"She's lost!" he thought. "Lost with all hands!"

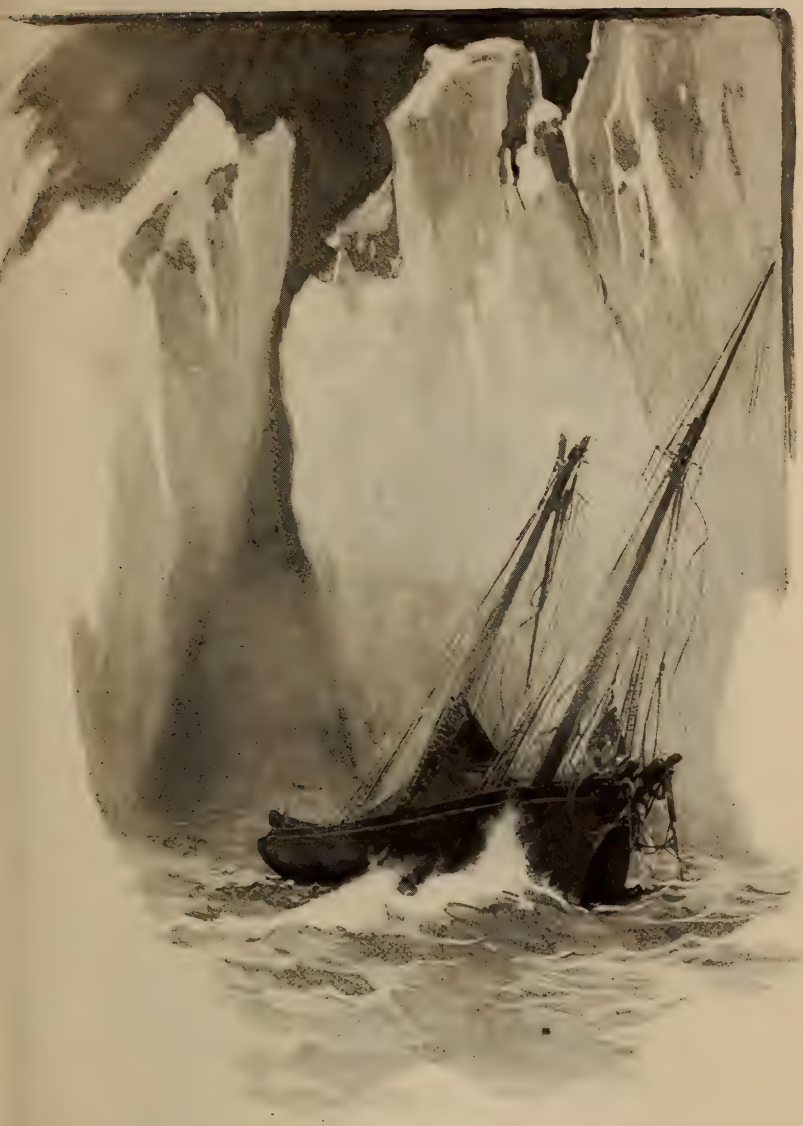
Nearer approach, however, disclosed the strange fact that there was a break in the ice. When the schooner was still a few fathoms nearer, it was observed that the great berg was in reality composed of two masses of ice, with a narrow strait leading between them.

The light was now stronger, and the fog had somewhat thinned; it was possible to distinguish shadowy outlines—to see that great cliffs of ice descended on each side of the passage to the water's edge. Still deeper in the mist it was lighter, as if the strait indeed led directly through the berg to the open sea beyond. The crew was gathered aft, breathlessly awaiting the schooner's fate, helpless to fend or aid; and the cook was lying on the roof of the cabin, where they had laid him down, revived in part, and desperately struggling to recover his senses.

"Lads," said the skipper, at last, "the Lord has the schooner in His hands. They's a way through the ice. He's guidin' her into it, but whether He'll save us or not, He only knows."

The *Rescue* drifted fairly into the passage, which was irregular, but in no part less than twice the width of the vessel. She was swept on, swinging from side to side, striking her bow here and her stern there; and with every shock fragments of rotten ice fell in a shower from above.

How soon one might strike one of their number down, no man knew. How soon some great mass, now poised in the mist, might be dislodged



"SHE'S LOST!" HE THOUGHT. "LOST WITH ALL HANDS."

and crush the schooner in its fall, no man knew. How soon the towering cliffs might swing together and grind the ship to splinters, no man could tell. Were these masses of ice connected deep down under water? Or were they floating free?

There were no answers to these questions. On went the schooner, stern foremost, slipping ever nearer to the open.[1]

"Skipper, sir," the first hand pleaded, "leave us launch the quarter-boat an' pull out. 'Tis—'tis—too horrible here."

"Ay, lads, if you will," was the reply.

It was then discovered that a block of ice had fallen in the boat at the bows, and sprung the planking. She was too leaky to launch; there was nothing for it but to wait.

"We'll calk those leaks as best we can," said the skipper. "They's no tellin' what might——"

The stern struck a projection, and the bow swung round and lodged on the other side. The schooner was jammed in the passage, almost broadside to the wind. They made a shift at calking the leaks with rags and a square of

[1] At this point it may be of interest to the reader to know that the incident is true.

oiled canvas. At all hazards the schooner must be freed.

"We must get her off quick, lads!" the skipper cried. "Come, now, who's going with me in the boat t' tow?"

"I, sir," said young Billy, stepping forward eagerly.

"I, sir," said the first hand.

"So it is," said the skipper. "Andy, Tom, when we hauls her bow off, do you stand here with a gaff an' push. Lower away that boat, now! Billy, do you fetch a bucket for bailin'."

The boat was launched with great difficulty from her place in the stern davits. She began at once to fill, for the calking had been ill done, and she was sadly damaged. It took courage to leap into her from the taffrail, leaky as she was, and tossing about; but there was a desperate sort of courage in the hearts of the men who had volunteered, and they leaped, one by one.

Billy fell to bailing, and the skipper and the first hand rowed forward to catch the line. The line once caught and made fast, they pulled out with might and main.

"She's fillin' fast, sir!" Billy gasped.

"Bail, b'y, bail!"

The tow-rope was now taut. The skipper and the first hand pulled with such strength that each stroke of an oar made a hissing little whirlpool.

"'Tis gainin' on me fast, sir," said Billy.

"Give way! Give way!" cried the skipper.

The bow of the schooner swung round inch by inch—so slowly that the sinking of the boat seemed inevitable.

"She'll sink, sir!" said Billy, in alarm, but still bailing steadily.

"Pull! Pull!"

When the schooner was once more in her old position—stern foremost, and driving slowly through the passage—the water was within an inch of the seats of the boat, which was now heavy and almost unmanageable. Twenty fathoms of water lay between the boat and the bow of the schooner.

"She's goin' down, sir!" said Billy.

"Cast lines!" the skipper shouted to those aboard.

Water curled over the gunwales. The boat stopped dead, and wavered, on the point of sinking. Two lines came whizzing towards her, uncoiling in their flight. The one was caught by the first hand, who threw himself into the water

and was hauled aboard. Billy and the skipper caught the other. With its help and a few strong strokes they made the bow chains and clambered to the deck.

"She's drivin' finely," said the skipper, when he had looked around. "Stand by, there, an' be ready with the fores'l! We'll soon be through."

It was true enough; in a few minutes the schooner had safely drifted through the passage, and was making off from the berg under a reefed foresail, while the mist cleared and the sun shone out, and the peaks and cliffs of the island of ice, far astern, shone and glistened. And three days later the young skipper bounded up the path at Ruddy Cove, and the little toddler whom he loved was at the kitchen door to greet him.

CHAPTER XV

In Which the Ruddy Cove Doctor Tells Billy Topsail and a Stranger How He Came to Learn that the Longest Way 'Round is Sometimes the Shortest Way Home

IT was a quiet evening—twilight: with the harbour water unruffled, and the colours of the afterglow fast fading from the sky. Billy Topsail and the doctor and a stranger sat by the surgery door, watching the boats come in from the sea, and their talk had been of the common dangers of that life.

"It was a very narrow escape," said the doctor.

"Crossing the harbour!" the stranger exclaimed. "Why, 'tis not two hundred yards!"

"'Twas my narrowest escape—and 'twas all because of Billy Topsail."

"Along o' *me!*" cried Billy.

"Ay," said the doctor; "'twas all along o' you. Some years ago," he continued, "when you were a toddler in pinafores, you were taken suddenly ill. It was a warm day in the spring of the year. The ice was still in the harbour, locked

in by the rocks at the narrows, though the snow had all melted from the hills, and green things were shooting from the earth in the gardens. The weather had been fine for a week," the doctor continued, addressing the stranger, "Day by day the harbour ice had grown more unsafe, until, when Billy was taken ill, only the daring ventured to cross upon it.

"Billy's father came rushing into the surgery in a pitiable state of grief and fright. I knew when I first caught sight of his face that Billy was ill.

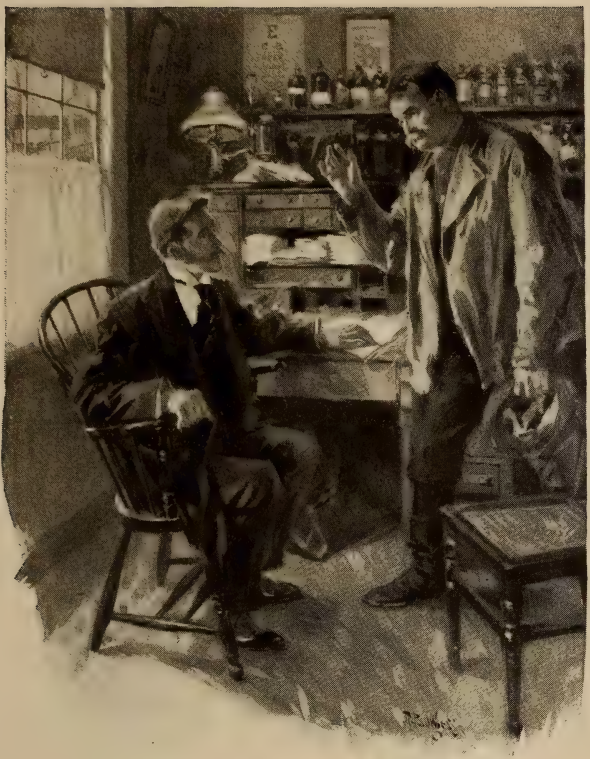
"'Doctor," said he, 'my little lad's wonderful sick. Come quick!'

"'Can we cross by the ice?' I asked.

"'I've come by that way,' said he. ''Tis safe enough t' risk. Make haste, doctor, sir! Make haste!'

"'Lead the way!' said I.

"He led so cleverly that we crossed without once sounding the ice. It was a zigzag way—a long, winding course—and I knew the day after, though I was too intent upon the matter in hand to perceive it at the moment, that only his experience and acquaintance with the condition of the ice made the passage possible. After midnight,



"MY LITTLE LAD'S WONDERFUL SICK. COME QUICK!"

when my situation was one of extreme peril, I realized that the way had been neither safe for me, who followed, nor easy for the man who led.

"'My boy is dying, doctor!' said the mother, when we entered the house. 'Oh, save him!'

"My sympathy for the child and his parents, —they loved that lad—no less than a certain professional interest which takes hold of a young physician in such cases, kept me at Billy's bedside until long, long after dark. I need not have stayed so long—ought not to have stayed—for the lad was safe and out of pain; but in this far-away place a man must be both nurse and doctor, and there I found myself, at eleven o'clock of a dark night, worn out, and anxious only to reach my bed by the shortest way.

"'I thinks, sir,' said Billy's father, when I made ready to go, 'that I wouldn't go back by the ice.'

"'Oh, nonsense!' said I. 'We came over without any trouble, and I'll find my way back, never fear.'

"'I wisht you'd stay here the night,' said the mother. 'If you'll bide, sir, we'll make you comfortable.'

"'No, no,' said I. 'I must get to my own bed.'

"'If you'll not go round by the shore, sir,' said the man, 'leave me pilot you across.'

"'Stay with your lad,' said I, somewhat testily. 'I'll cross by the ice.'

"''Twill be the longest way home the night,' said he.

"When a man is sleepy and worn out he can be strangely perverse. I would have my own way; and, to my cost, I was permitted to take it. Billy's father led me down to the landing-stage, put a gaff in my hand, and warned me to be careful—warned me particularly not to take a step without sounding the ice ahead with my gaff; and he brought the little lesson to an end with a wistful, 'I wisht you wouldn't risk it.'

"The tone of his voice, the earnestness and warm feeling with which he spoke, gave me pause. I hesitated; but the light in my surgery window, shining so near at hand, gave me a vision of comfortable rest, and I put the momentary indecision away from me.

"'It is two hundred yards to my surgery by the ice,' I said, 'and it is two miles round the

harbour by the road. I'm going by the shortest way.'

"'You'll find it the longest, sir,' said he.

"I repeated my directions as to the treatment of little Billy, then gave the man good-night, and stepped out on the ice, gaff in hand. The three hours following were charged with more terror and despair than, doubtless, any year of my life to come shall know. I am not morbidly afraid of death. It was not that—not the simple, natural fear of death that made me suffer. It was the manner of its coming—in the night, with the harbour folk, all ignorant of my extremity, peacefully sleeping around me—the slow, cruel approach of it, closing in upon every hand, lying all about me, and hidden from me by the night."

The doctor paused. He looked over the quiet water of the harbour.

"Yes," he said, repeating the short, nervous laugh, "it was a narrow escape. The sun of the afternoon—it had shone hot and bright—had weakened the ice, and a strong, gusty wind, such a wind as breaks up the ice every spring, was blowing down the harbour to the sea. It had overcast the sky with thick clouds. The night was dark. Nothing more of the opposite shore

than the vaguest outline of the hills—a blacker shadow in a black sky—was to be seen.

"But I had the lamp in the surgery window to guide me, and I pushed out from the shore, resolute and hopeful. I made constant use of my gaff to sound the ice. Without it I should have been lost before I had gone twenty yards. From time to time, in rotten places, it broke through the ice with but slight pressure; then I had to turn to right or left, as seemed best, keeping to the general direction as well as I could all the while.

"As I proceeded, treading lightly and cautiously, I was dismayed to find that the condition of the ice was worse than the worst I had feared.

"'Ah,' thought I, with a wistful glance towards the light in the window, 'I'll be glad enough to get there.'

"There were lakes of open water in my path; there were flooded patches, sheets of thin, rubbery ice, stretches of rotten 'slob.' I was not even sure that a solid path to my surgery wound through these dangers; and if path there were, it was a puzzling maze, strewn with pitfalls, with death waiting upon a misstep.

"Had it been broad day, my situation would

have been serious enough. In the night, with the treacherous places all covered up and hidden, it was desperate. I determined to return; but I was quite as unfamiliar with the lay of the ice behind as with the path ahead. A moment of thought persuaded me that the best plan was the boldest—to push on for the light in the window. I should have, at least, a star to guide me.

"'I have not far to go,' I thought. 'I must proceed with confidence and a common-sense sort of caution. Above all, I must *not* lose my nerve.'

"It was easy to make the resolve; it was hard to carry it out. When I was searching for solid ice and my gaff splashed water, when the ice offered no more resistance to my gaff than a similar mass of sea-foam, when my foothold bent and cracked beneath me, when, upon either side, lay open water, and a narrowing, uncertain path lay ahead, my nerve was sorely tried.

"At times, overcome by the peril I could not see, I stopped dead and trembled. I feared to strike my gaff, feared to set my foot down, feared to quit the square foot of solid ice upon which I stood. Had it not been for the high wind—high and fast rising to a gale—I should have sat down

and waited for the morning. But there were ominous sounds abroad, and, although I knew little about the ways of ice, I felt that the break-up would come before the dawn. There was nothing for it but to go on.

"And on I went; but at last—the mischance was inevitable—my step was badly chosen. My foot broke through, and I found myself, of a sudden, sinking. I threw myself forward, and fell with my arms spread out; thus I distributed my weight over a wider area of ice and was borne up.

"For a time I was incapable of moving a muscle; the surprise, the rush of terror, the shock of the fall, the sudden relief of finding myself safe for the moment had stunned me. So I lay still, hugging the ice; for how long I cannot tell, but I know that when I recovered my self-possession my first thought was that the light was still burning in the surgery window—an immeasurable distance away. I must reach that light, I knew; but it was a long time before I had the courage to move forward.

"Then I managed to get the gaff under my chest, so that I could throw some part of my weight upon it, and began to crawl. The progress was inch by inch—slow and toilsome, with

no moment of security to lighten it. I was keenly aware of my danger; at any moment, as I knew, the ice might open and let me in.

"I had gained fifty yards or more, and had come to a broad lake, which I must round, when the light in the window went out.

"'Elizabeth has given me up for the night,' I thought in despair. 'She has blown out the light and gone to bed.'

"There was now no point of light to mark my goal. It was very dark; and in a few minutes I was lost. I had the wind to guide me, it is true; but I soon mistrusted the wind. It was veering, it had veered, I thought; it was not possible for me to trust it implicitly. In whatever direction I set my face I fancied that the open sea lay that way.

"Again and again I started, but upon each occasion I had no sooner begun to crawl than I fancied that I had mischosen the way. Of course I cried for help, but the wind swept my frantic screams away, and no man heard them. The moaning and swish of the gale, as it ran past the cottages, drowned my cries. The sleepers were not alarmed.

"Meanwhile that same wind was breaking up

the ice. I could hear the cracking and grinding long before I felt the motion of the pan upon which I lay. But at last I did feel that mass of ice turn and gently heave, and then I gave myself up for lost.

"'Doctor! Doctor!'

"The voice came from far to windward. The wind caught my answering shout and carried it out to sea.

"'They will not hear me,' I thought. 'They will not come to help me.'

"The light shone out from the surgery window again. Then lights appeared in the neighbouring houses, and passed from room to room. There had been an alarm. But my pan was breaking up! Would they find me in time? Would they find me at all?

"Lanterns were now gleaming on the rocks back of my wharf. Half a dozen men were coming down on the run, bounding from rock to rock of the path. By the light of the lanterns I saw them launch a boat on the ice and drag it out towards me. From the edge of the shore ice they let it slip into the water, pushed off and came slowly through the opening lanes of water, calling my name at intervals.

"The ice was fast breaking and moving out. When they caught my hail they were not long about pushing the boat to where I lay. Nor, you may be sure, was I long about getting aboard."

The doctor laughed nervously.

"Doctor," said the stranger, "how did they know that you were in distress?"

"Oh," said the doctor, "it was Billy's father. He was worried, and walked around by the shore. When he found that I was not home, he roused the neighbours."

"As the proverb runs," said the stranger, "the longest way round is sometimes the shortest way home."

"Yes," said the doctor, "I chose the longest way."

CHAPTER XVI

Describing How Billy Topsail Set out for Ruddy Cove with Her Majesty's Mail and Met with Catastrophe

THROUGH the long, evil-tempered winter, when ice and high winds keep the coasting boats from the outports, the Newfoundland mails are carried by hand from settlement to settlement, even to the farthermost parts of the bleak peninsular to the north.

Arch Butt's link in the long chain was from Burnt Bay to Ruddy Cove. Once a week, come wind, blizzard or blinding sunlight, with four dollars and a half to reward him at the end of it, he made the eighty miles of wilderness and sea, back and forth, with the mail-bag on his broad back.

No man of the coast, save he, dared face that stretch in all weathers. It may be that he tramped a league, skated a league, sailed a league, sculled a league, groped his way through a league of night, breasted his way through a league of wind, picked his way over a league of shifting ice.

To be sure, he chose the way which best

favoured his progress and least frayed the thread upon which his life hung.

"Seems t' me, b'y," he said to his mate from New Bay, when the great gale of '98 first appeared in the northeast sky—"seems t' me we *may* make Duck Foot Cove the night, safe enough."

"Maybe, lad," was the reply, after a long, dubious survey of the rising clouds. "Maybe we'll get clear o' the gale, but 'twill be a close call, whatever (at any rate)."

"Maybe," said Arch. "'Twould be well t' get Her Majesty's mail so far as Duck Foot Cove, whatever."

When Arch Butt made Duck Foot Cove that night, he was on the back of his mate, who had held to him, through all peril, with such courage as makes men glorious. Ten miles up the bay, his right foot had been crushed in the ice, which the sea and wind had broken into unstable fragments. Luff of New Bay had left him in the cottage of Billy Topsail's uncle, Saul Ride, by the Head, the only habitation in the cove, and made the best of his own way to the harbours of the west coast of the bay. Three days' delay stared the Ruddy Cove mailman in the face.

"Will you not carry the mail t' Ruddy Cove, Saul Ride?" he demanded, when he had dressed his foot, and failed, stout as he was, to bear the pain of resting his weight upon it.

"'Tis too far in a gale for my old legs," said Ride, "an'——"

"But 'tis Her Majesty's mail!" cried Arch. "Won't you try, b'y?"

"An I had a chance t' make it, I'd try, quick enough," said Ride sharply; "but 'twould be not only me life, but the mail I'd lose. The ice do be broken up 'tween here an' Creepy Bluff; an' not even Arch Butt, hisself, could walk the hills."

"Three days lost!" Arch groaned. "All the letters three days late! An' all——"

"Letters!" Ride broke in scornfully. "Letters, is it? Don't you fret about they. A love letter for the parson's daughter; the price o' fish from St. John's for the old skipper; an' a merchant's account for every fisherman t' the harbour: they be small things t' risk life for."

The mailman laid his hand on the leather bag at his side. He fingered the government seal tenderly and his eyes flashed splendidly when he looked up.

"'Tis Her Majesty's mail!" he said. "Her Majesty's mail! Who knows what they be in this bag. Maybe, b'y—maybe—maybe they's a letter for old Aunt Esther Bludgel. She've waited this three year for a letter from that boy," he continued. "Maybe 'tis in there now. Sure, b'y, an' I believe '*tis* in there. Saul Ride, the mail must go!"

A touch of the bruised foot on the floor brought the mailman groaning to his chair again. If the mail were to go to Ruddy Cove that night, it was not to be carried on his back: that much was evident. Saul Ride gazed at him steadily for a moment. Something of the younger man's fine regard for duty communicated itself to him. There had been a time—the days of his strength—when he, too, would have thought of duty before danger. He went abstractly to the foot of the loft stair.

"Billy!" he called. "Billy!"

"Ay, Uncle Saul," was the quick response.

"I wants you, b'y."

Billy Topsail came swiftly down the stair. He was spending a week with his lonely Uncle Saul at Duck Foot Cove. A summons at that hour meant pressing service—need of haste.

What was the call? Were they all well at home? He glanced from one man to the other.

"B'y," said Ride, with a gesture towards the mail-bag, "will you carry that bag to Ruddy Cove? Will ——"

"Will you carry Her Majesty's mail t' Ruddy Cove?" Arch Butt burst out. His voice thrilled Billy, as he continued: "Her Majesty's mail!"

"'Tis but that black bag, b'y," Ride said quietly. "Will you take it t' Ruddy Cove t'-night? Please yourself about it."

"Ay," said Billy quickly. "When?"

"'Twill be light enough in four hours," said the mailman.

"Go back t' bed, b'y," Ride said. "I'll wake you when 'tis time t' be off."

Five minutes later the boy was sound asleep.

No Newfoundlander ventures out upon the ice without his gaff—a nine-foot pole, made of light, tough dog-wood, and iron-shod. It was with his own true gaff that Billy felt his way out of Duck Foot Cove as the night cleared away.

The sea had abated somewhat with the wind. In the bay beyond the cove, the broken ice was

freezing into one vast, rough sheet, solid as the coast rocks on the pans, but unsafe, and deceptive over the channels between. The course was down the bay, skirting the shore, to Creepy Bluff, then overland to Ruddy Cove, which is a port of the open sea: in all, twenty-one miles, with the tail of the gale to beat against.

"Feel every step o' the way till the light comes strong," had been old Saul Ride's last word to the boy. "Strike hard with your gaff before you put your foot down."

Billy kept his gaff before him—feeling his way much as a blind man taps the pavement as he goes along a city street. The search for solid ice led him this way and that, but his progress towards Creepy Bluff, the shadowy outline of which he soon could see, steadily continued. He surmised that it was still blowing hard in the open, beyond the shelter of the islands; and he wondered if the wind would sweep him off his feet when he essayed to cross Sloop Run, down which it ran, unbroken, from the sea to the bluff.

"Her Majesty's mail!" he muttered, echoing the thrill in the mailman's voice. "Her Majesty's mail!"

When the light was stronger—but it was not yet break of day—he thought to make greater haste by risking more. Now and again he chanced himself on a suspicious-looking black sheet. Now and again he ran nimbly over many yards of rubber ice, which yielded and groaned, but did not break. Often he ventured where Arch Butt would not have dared take his massive body. All this he did, believing always that he should not delay the Gull Arm mailman, who might even then be waiting for him in Ruddy Cove.

But when he had covered six miles of the route, he came to a wide channel which was not yet frozen over. It lay between two large pans. How far he might have to diverge from his course to cross without risk, he could not tell. He was impressed with the fact that, once across, the way lay clear before him—a long stretch of solid ice.

"Sure, I must cross here," he thought.

He sought for a large cake of floating ice, that he might ferry himself across with his gaff. None great enough to bear his weight was to be seen—none, at least, within reach of his gaff. There were small cakes a-plenty; these were

fragments heavy enough to bear him for but an instant. Could he cross on them? He thought he might leap from one to the other so swiftly that none would be called upon to sustain his full weight, and thus pass safely over.

With care he chose the path he would follow. Then, without hesitation, he leaped for the first cake—passed to the second—to the third—to the fourth—stepping so lightly from one to the other that the water did not touch the soles of his boots. In a moment, he was whistling on his way on the other side, leaving the channel ice bobbing excitedly behind him.

Soon he broke off whistling and began to sing. On he trudged, piping merrily:

'Way down on Pigeon Pond Island,
When daddy comes home from swilin',[1]
Cakes and tea for breakfast,
Pork and duff for dinner,
Cakes and tea for supper,
'Way down on Pigeon Pond Island.

At noon he came to an expanse of bad ice. He halted at the edge of it to eat a bit of the hard bread and dried venison in his nunny-bag.

[1] Sealing.

Then, forward again! He advanced with great caution, sounding every step, on the alert for thin places. A mile of this and he had grown weary. He was not so quick, not so sure, in his estimate of the strength of the ice. The wind, now blowing in stronger gusts, brought the water to his eyes and impaired his sight. He did not regret his undertaking, but he began ardently to wish that Creepy Bluff were nearer. Thus moved, his pace increased—with ever-increasing peril to himself. He must make haste!

What befell the boy came suddenly. He trusted his feet to a drift of snow. Quick as a flash, and all unready, he was submerged in the water beneath.

CHAPTER XVII

Billy Topsail Wrings Out His Clothes and Finds Himself Cut off From Shore by Thirty Yards of Heaving Ice

BILLY could swim—could swim like any Newfoundland dog bred in Green Bay. Moreover, the life he led—the rugged, venturesome calling of the shore fishermen—had inured him to sudden danger. First of all he freed himself from the cumbersome mail-bag. He would not have abandoned it had he not been in such case as when, as the Newfoundlanders say, it was "every hand for his life."

Then he made for the surface with swift, strong strokes. A few more strokes brought him to the edge of the ice. He clambered out, still gasping for breath, and turned about to account to himself for his predicament.

The drift of snow had collapsed; he observed that it had covered some part of a wide hole, and that the exposed water was almost of a colour with the ice beyond—a polished black. Hence, he did not bitterly blame himself for the false

step, as he might have done had he plunged himself into obvious danger through carelessness. He did not wonder that he had been deceived.

Her Majesty's mail, so far as the boy could determine, was slowly sinking to the bottom of the bay.

There was no help in regret. To escape from the bitter wind and the dusk, now fast falling, was the present duty. He could think of all the rest when he had leisure to sit before the fire and dream. He took off his jacket and wrung it out —a matter of some difficulty, for it was already stiff with frost. His shirt followed—then his boots and his trousers. Soon he was stripped to his rosy skin. The wind, sweeping in from the open sea, stung him as it whipped past.

When the last garment was wrung out he was shivering, and his teeth were chattering so fast that he could not keep them still. Dusk soon turns to night on this coast, and the night comes early. There was left but time enough to reach the first of the goat-paths at Creepy Bluff, two miles away—not time to finish the overland tramp to Ruddy Cove—before darkness fell.

When he was about to dress, his glance

chanced to pass over the water. The mail-bag—it could be nothing else—was floating twenty yards off the ice. It had been prepared with cork for such accidents, which not infrequently befall it.

"'Tis Her Majesty's mail, b'y," Billy could hear the mailman say.

"But 'tis more than I can carry t' Ruddy Cove now," he thought.

Nevertheless, he made no move to put on his shirt. He continued to look at the mail-bag. "'Tis the mail—gov'ment mail," he thought again. Then, after a rueful look at the water: "Sure, nobody'll know that it floated. 'Tis as much as I can do t' get myself safe t' Gull Cove. I'd freeze on the way t' Ruddy Cove."

There was no comfort in these excuses. There, before him, was the bag. It was in plain sight. It had not sunk. He would fail in his duty to the country if he left it floating there. It was an intolerable thought!

"'Tis t' Ruddy Cove I'll take that bag this day," he muttered.

He let himself gingerly into the water, and struck out. It was bitter cold, but he persevered, with fine courage, until he had his arm safely

linked through the strap of the bag. It was the country he served! In some vague form this thought sounded in his mind, repeating itself again and again, while he swam for the ice with the bag in tow.

He drew himself out with much difficulty, hauled the mail-bag after him, and proceeded to dress with all speed. His clothes were frozen stiff, and he had to beat them on the ice to soften them; but the struggle to don them sent the rich blood rushing through his body, and he was warmed to a glow.

On went the bag, and off went the boy. When he came to the firmer ice, and Creepy Bluff was within half a mile, the wind carried this cheery song up the bay:

> Lukie's boat is painted green,
> The finest boat that ever was seen;
> Lukie's boat has cotton sails,
> A juniper rudder and galvanized nails.

At Creepy Bluff, which the wind strikes with full force, the ice was breaking up inshore. The gale had risen with the coming of the night. Great seas spent their force beneath the ice—cracking it, breaking it, slowly grinding it to pieces against the rocks.

The Bluff marks the end of the bay. No ice forms beyond. Thus the waves swept in with unbroken power, and were fast reducing the shore cakes to a mass of fragments. Paul was cut off from the shore by thirty yards of heaving ice. No bit of it would bear his weight; nor, so fine had it been ground, could he leap from place to place as he had done before.

"'Tis sprawl I must," he thought.

The passage was no new problem. He had been in such case more than once upon his return from the offshore seal-hunt. Many fragments would together bear him up, where few would sink beneath him. He lay flat on his stomach, and, with the gaff to help support him, crawled out from the solid place, dragging the bag. His body went up and down with the ice. Now an arm was thrust through, again a leg went under water.

Progress was fearfully slow. Inch by inch he gained on the shore — crawling — crawling steadily. All the while he feared that the great pans would drift out and leave the fragments room to disperse. Once he had to spread wide his arms and legs and pause until the ice was packed closer.

"Two yards more—only two yards more!" he could say at last.

Once on the road to Ruddy Cove, which he well knew, his spirits rose; and with a cheery mood came new strength. It was a rough road, up hill and down again, through deep snowdrifts and over slippery rocks. Night fell; but there was light enough to show the way, save in the deeper valleys, and there he had to struggle along as best he might.

Step after step, hill after hill, thicket after thicket: cheerfully he trudged on; for the mail-bag was safe on his back, and Ruddy Cove was but three miles distant. Three was reduced to two, two to one, one to the last hill.

From the crest of Ruddy Rock he could look down on the lights of the harbour—yellow lights, lying in the shadows of the valley. There was a light in the post-office. They were waiting for him there—waiting for their letters—waiting to send the mail on to the north. In a few minutes he could say that Her Majesty's mail had been brought safe to Ruddy Cove.

"Be the mail come?"

Billy looked up from his seat by the roaring

fire in the post-office. An old woman had come in. There was a strange light in her eyes—the light of a hope which survives, spite of repeated disappointment.

"Sure, Aunt Esther; 'tis here at last."

"Be there a letter for me?"

Billy hoped that there was. He longed to see those gentle eyes shine—to see the famished look disappear.

"No, Aunt Esther; 'tis not come yet. Maybe 'twill come next ——"

"Sure, I've waited these three year," she said, with a trembling lip. "'Tis from me son ——"

"Ha!" cried the postmaster. "What's this? 'Tis all blurred by the water. 'Missus E—s—B—l—g—e—l.' Sure, 'tis you, woman. 'Tis a letter for you at last!"

"'Tis from me son!" the old woman muttered eagerly. "'Tis t' tell me where he is, an'—an'—when he's comin' home. Thank God, the mail came safe the night."

What if Billy had left the mail-bag to soak and sink in the waters of the bay? What if he had failed in his duty to the people? How many other such letters might there not be in that bag for the mothers and fathers of the northern ports?

"Thank God," he thought, "that Her Majesty's mail came safe the night!"

Then he went off home, and met Bobby Lot on the way.

"Hello!" said Bobby. "Got back?"

"Hello yourself!" said Billy. "I did."

They eyed each other delightedly; they were too boyish to shake hands.

"How's the ice?" asked Bobby Lot.

"Not bad," said Billy.

CHAPTER XVIII

In Which Billy Topsail Joins the Whaler Viking and a School is Sighted

OF a sunny afternoon the Newfoundland coastal steamer *Clyde* dropped Billy Topsail at Snook's Arm, the lair of the whaler *Viking:* a deep, black inlet of the sea, fouled by the blood and waste flesh of forgotten victims, from the slimy edge of which, where a score of whitewashed cottages were squatted, the rugged hills lifted their heads to the clean blue of the sky and fairly held their noses. It was all the manager's doing. Billy had but given him direction through the fog from Mad Mull to the landing place of the mail-boat. This was at Ruddy Cove, in the spring, when the manager was making an annual visit to the old skipper.

"If you want a berth for the summer, Billy," he had said, "you can be ship's boy on the *Viking*."

On the *Viking*—the whaler! Billy was not in doubt. And so it came to pass, in due course of time, that the *Clyde* dropped him at Snook's Arm.

At half-past three of the next morning, when the dark o' night was but lightened by a rosy promise out to sea, the *Viking's* lines were cast off. At half speed the little steamer moved out upon the quiet waters of the Arm, where the night still lay thick and cold—slipped with a soft chug ! chug ! past the high, black hills ; factory and cottages melting with the mist and shadows astern, and the new day glowing in the eastern sky. She was an up-to-date, wide-awake little monster, with seventy-five kills to her credit in three months, again composedly creeping from the lair to the hunt, equipped with deadly weapons of offense.

" 'Low we'll get one the day, sir ? " Billy asked the cook.

" Wonderful quiet day," replied the cook, dubiously. " 'Twill be hard fishin'."

The fin-back whale is not a stupid, passive monster, to be slaughtered off-hand ; nor is the sea a well-ordered shambles. Within the experience of the *Viking's* captain, one fin-back wrecked a schooner with a quick slap of the tail, and another looked into the forecastle of an iron whaler from below. The fin-back is the biggest, fleetest, shyest whale of them all ; until an in-

genious Norwegian invented the harpoon gun, they wallowed and multiplied in the Newfoundland waters undisturbed. They were quite safe from pursuit; no whaler of the old school dreamed of taking after them in his cockle shell —they were too wary and fleet for that.

"Ay," the cook repeated; "on a day like this a whale can *play* with the *Viking*."

The *Viking* was an iron screw-steamer, designed for chasing whales, and for nothing else. She was mostly engines, winches and gun. She could slip along, without much noise, at sixteen knots an hour; and she could lift sixty tons from the bottom of the sea with her little finger. Her gun—the swivel gun, with a three-inch bore, pitched at the bow, clear of everything—could drive a four-foot, 123-pound harpoon up to the hilt in the back of a whale if within range; and the harpoon itself—it protruded from the muzzle of the gun, with the rope attached to the shaft and coiled below—was a deadly missile. It was tipped with an iron bomb, which was designed to explode in the quarry's vitals when the rope snapped taut, and with half a dozen long barbs, which were to spread and take hold at the same instant.

"Well," Billy Topsail sighed, his glance on the gun and the harpoon, "if they hits a whale, that there arrow ought t' do the work!"

"It does," said the cook, quietly.

All morning long, they were all alive on deck —every man of that Norwegian crew, from the grinning man in the crow's nest, which was lashed to a stubby yellow mast, to the captain on the gun platform, with the glass to his eyes, and the stokers who stuck their heads out of the engine room for a breath of fresh air. The squat, grim little *Viking* was speeding across Notre Dame Bay, with a wide, frothy wake behind her, and the water curling from her bows. She was for all the world like a man making haste to business in the morning, the appointment being, in this case, off a low, gray coast, which the lifting haze was but then disclosing.

It was broad day: the sea was quiet, the sun shining brightly, the sky a cloudless blue; a fading breeze ruffled the water, and the ripples flashed in the sunlight. Dead ahead and far away, where the gray of the coast rocks shaded to the blue of the sea, little puffs of spray were drifting off with the light wind, like the puff of

smoke from a distant rifle: they broke and drifted and vanished.

From time to time mirror-flashes of light—swift little flashes—struck Billy's eyes and darted away. Puff after puff of spray, flash after flash of light: the far-off sea seemed to be alive with the quarry. But where was the thrilling old cry of "There she blows!" or its Norwegian equivalent? The lookout had but spoken a quiet word to the captain, who, in turn, had spoken a quiet word to the steersman.

"W'ales," said the captain, whose English had its limitations. "Ho—far off!"

CHAPTER XIX

In which the Chase is Kept up and the Captain Promises Himself a Kill

THE number of whales was less than the captain of the *Viking* had thought. When the vessel came up with the school, however, there were twenty or more fin-backs to pick and choose from. They lay on every hand, wallowing at the surface of the sea and spouting thick, low streams of water with evident delight: whales far and near, big and small, in pairs and threes, rising and gently sinking, blowing and *hon-g-king*, and, at last, arching their broad, finned backs for the long dive.

The breathing spell was of two or three minutes' duration, the dive of five or ten, and might last much longer. Billy was told that as the whales went thus, rising and diving, they travelled in a circle, feeding on young caplin and herring, squid and crustaceans. He had never thought to admire the grace of a whale; but his admiration was compelled: the ponderous, ill-proportioned monsters were so perfectly adapted to the

element they were in that the languor and grace with which they moved was a delight—particularly when they arched their glistening black backs and softly, languidly vanished.

But meantime the *Viking* was lying silent and still; and —

"*Hon-g-k!*" from off the port bow.

"Ha!" exclaimed the captain.

A big whale had risen. The long "*Hon-g-k!*" as he had inhaled a small cyclone of breath was sufficient to tell that. He was big and he was near.

"Full speed!" quietly from the captain in Norwegian.

The steersman had already spun the wheel without orders. The *Viking* swung in a half circle and made for the whale at top speed. There was just a quiver of excitement abroad—a deepening glitter in the eyes of the crew, and silence. The rush was upon the whale from behind—instant, swift, straight: the engines chug-chugged and the water swished noisily at the bows. There was no lying in ambush, no stalking: it was sight your game and make for him.

The captain leaned lazily on the gun, which

he had not yet swung into position for firing; his legs were crossed, though the whale was not a hundred yards away, and he was placidly smoking his pipe. The fin-back lay dead ahead now, apparently unconscious of the *Viking's* approach, and she was soon so near that his escape seemed to Billy to be beyond the barest chance. The captain waved his hand, calmly looked over the sea, and fell again into his careless position, with one eye on the whale.

At once the engines stopped and the *Viking* slipped softly on with diminishing speed. When she was within thirty yards of the whale, each separate muscle of Billy's body was tight with excitement—but the whale arched his back and slipped down deep into the water with a contemptuous swing of his broad, strong tail.

"Psh-h!" exclaimed the captain, giving one slippered foot a kick with the other. "Psh!"

They were running over a stretch of frothy, swirling water, where the whale had lain a moment before.

"*Hon-g-k!*" from off the starboard quarter.

The captain signaled the steersman, who shouted "Full speed!" down the wheel-house tube. In a flash they were chug-chugging in

haste after another whale—which eluded them at once, with no more fuss than the first had made: no blowing and frantic splashing; just a lifting of the back and a languid swing of the tail. Thus the third, the fourth, the fifth: again and again, through the hours of that quiet morning, they gave chase; but all to no purpose —on the contrary, indeed, with the bad effect of alarming the whole school. The whales made sport of them; the flash of their fins, as they slipped away beyond pursuit, was most aggravating.

Soon the captain's "Psh!" became guttural, and communicated itself to the man in the crow's-nest and the engineer who was off duty; the elusive fin-backs were too much for the patience of them all. But for hours the "old man" leaned on the gun and smoked his pipe, intent on the chase through every moment of that time. He kicked his right foot with his left; his broad back shook with rage; strange ejaculations drifted back with the clouds of tobacco smoke: that was all. Repeated disappointment but heightened the alertness and eagerness of the crew. Every lost whale was dismissed with a "Psh-h!" and quite forgotten in the pursuit of the next one.

Nine hours out from Snook's Arm and six with the school without pointing a gun!

"Agh!" the captain exclaimed, jumping from the gun platform, at last, "the whale captain have the worst business of all men. Agh! but I wish for rough seas. But I wish I had my harpoon in the back of some whale."

All days are not blue. Before the summer was over, Billy Topsail learned there were times when the *Viking* put out from the shelter of Snook's Arm to a sea that *is* rough. A gale from the northeast, gray and gusty, whips up the white horses, and frost gives new weight to the water. Wind and fog and high seas and sleet make the chase perilous as well as bitter. She stumbles through the waves and wallows in the trough with a clear-cut duty before her—to catch and kill a whale: the little niceties of dodging breaking waves cannot be indulged in when all manœvering must be directed towards coming up with the quarry from the proper firing-quarter.

But Billy's first day was clear and quiet; and the whales were having a glorious innings with the enemy.

By noon the prospects for a kill had faded to a

bare possibility; the school had been well scattered. Down the coast and up the coast, out to sea and far away across the bay, puffs of spray made known the various directions the whales had taken. About two o'clock—ten hours out from Snook's Arm, with no let up in duty—the crew were attracted by the deep, long *hon-g-k* of a big fellow out to sea and by the spouting of his two companions: a group of three, male and female, doubtless, with a well-grown young one. They gave chase. Captain and crew had come to that pass when fury gets the better of patience.

It was determined to hunt that little school to the death or until deep night put an end to the chase.

"I get 'im," said the captain between his teeth. "He is big. I get him—or none."

It was not easy to get him. They were led twenty miles to sea in short rushes, each of which ended in disappointment and elicited a storm of guttural ejaculations; they were lured inshore, where submerged rocks were a menace; they were taken up the coast and back again towards the islands of the lower shore and once more to sea. Mile after mile—hour after hour! They

came near—they could have hit the beast with a stone. Occasionally the captain swung the gun into position and put a hand on the trigger; but the arching back always gave notice, in good time, that he had been balked again. They tried to guess the point where the quarry would rise; they steamed near that point, and lay there waiting.

"*Hon-g-k!*" from half a mile astern.

"Agh!" cried the captain, chagrin twisting his face. "The whale captain have pos—ee—tiv—lee the worst——! Full speed!"

Off again in persistent chase. Meantime the sun had declined; evening was drawing on, with gray clouds mounting in the west, and a breeze rising inshore. The sea was spread with shadow, and all the ripples grew to little waves, which, hissing as they broke, obscured the swish of water at our bows. The opportunity was better, and the whales, it may be, had acquired the inevitable contempt that familiarity breeds. The *Viking* crept nearer. Each time, a little nearer; and, by and by, when she had come within range—within range for the first time that day—and was running at half speed, with the grayish-black backs most temptingly exposed, the captain

dropped the muzzle of the gun, took swift sight, and—swung the gun around with impatient force! The whale was gone on the long dive before a vital spot had been exposed.

There was no impatience of action aboard the *Viking:* the harpoon might even then have been fast in the whale's back, but the captain had coolly withheld his stroke until the opportunity should be precisely what he sought. And this display of patience after a fruitless chase of fifteen hours! Billy Topsail gasped his disappointment. But the captain laughed.

"I get him yet," he said. "Soon, now," after a look at sea and darkening sky.

CHAPTER XX

The Mate of the Fin-Back Whale Rises for the Last Time, With a Blood-Red Sunset Beyond, and Billy Topsail Says, "Too bad!"

HALF a mile ahead the whales rose. The *Viking* crept near without giving alarm, and waited for them to dive and rise again. The warning swish and *hon-g-k* sounded next from off the port bow. There was a shout from the crew. The school lay close in, headed away; they were splashing and blissfully *hon-g-king*—and the *Viking* not fifty yards distant. She was upon them from behind before they had well drawn breath. Steam was shut off. The captain's eye was at the butt of the gun, and his hand was on the trigger. The boat crept nearer—so near that Billy Topsail could have leaped from the bow to the back of the young whale; and she was fast losing way.

But it was not the young whale that the captain wanted. He held his fire. Down went the young one. Down went the bull whale. But had he arched his back? The old female wallowed a moment longer and dived with

arched back. She barely escaped the *Viking's* bows and might have been mortally harpooned with ease. But it was not the female that the captain wanted. It was the big male. There was not a whale in sight. Still the captain kept his eye at the butt of the gun and his hand on the trigger.

A moment later—the steamer was slipping along very slowly—the water ahead was disturbed. The back of the bull whale appeared. A stream of water shot into the air and broke like a fountain. The *Viking* kept pace—gained; momentarily creeping nearer, until the range was but ten yards. Then the whale, as though taking alarm, arched his back; and—

Bang!

The puff of smoke drifted away. Billy Topsail caught sight of the harpoon, sunk to the hilt in the whale's side. Then the waters closed over the wounded beast.

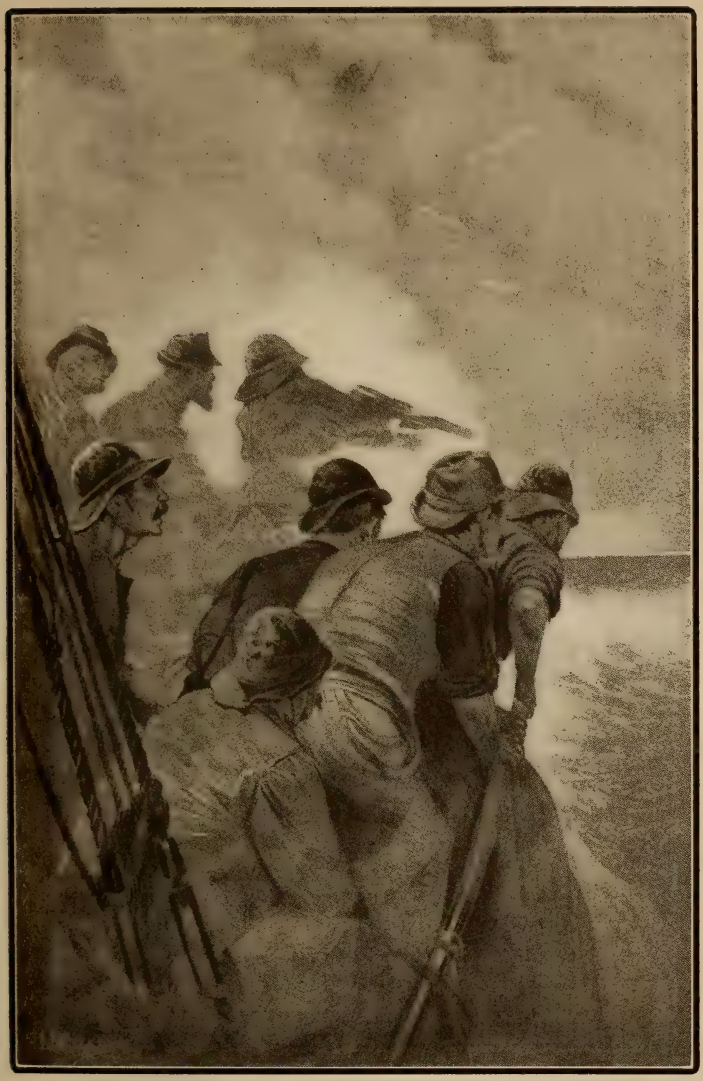
"Ha!" cried the captain, jumping from the platform, and strutting about with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. "Did you see me? Ha! It is over!"

A cheer broke from the crew. The men ran forward to their stations at the winch.

"Ha!" the captain repeated with intense satisfaction, his ruddy face wreathed in smiles. "Did you see me? Ha-a-a-a! It is a dead w'ale."

The harpoon line was paying out slowly, controlled by a big steam winch—a gigantic fishing reel. The engines were stopped; but the *Viking* was going forward at a lively rate as the catch plunged down and on. Minute after minute slipped away—five minutes; then the rope slackened somewhat, and, a moment later, the big whale came to the surface and spouted streams of blood—streams as red as the streak of sunset light in the gray sky beyond him. He floundered there in agony, blowing and *hon-g-king* and beating the sea with his tail: turning the water crimson with his blood.

It took him a long, long time to die, frightfully torn by the bomb though he was. He dived and rose and coughed; and at last he sank slowly down, down, and still down; drawing out a hundred and forty fathom of line: straight down to the bottom of the sea in that place. From time to time the captain touched the rope with his fingers; and when the tremour of life had passed from it he gave the signal to haul



"IT IS A DEAD W'ALE!"

away. Half an hour later the carcass of the monster was inflated with gas, lying belly up at the surface of the water, and lashed by the tail to the port bow of the steamer.

Off the starboard quarter—far away where the dusk had gathered—the mate of the dead whale rose, *hon-g-ked*, dived and was seen no more.

"Too bad!" muttered Billy Topsail.

CHAPTER XXI

In Which Billy Topsail Goes Fishing in Earnest. Concerning, also, Feather's Folly of the Devil's Teeth, Mary Robinson, and the Wreck of the Fish Killer

FEATHER'S FOLLY was one of a group of troublesome islands lying off Cape Grief on the way to the Labrador. Surveyed by a generously inaccurate apprentice it might have measured an acre. It was as barren as an old bone; but a painstaking man, with unimpaired eyesight, if he lingered long and lovingly enough over the task, could doubtless have discovered more than one blade of grass. There is no adjective in the English language adequate to describe its forbidding appearance as viewed from the sea in a gale of wind.

On the chart it was a mere dot—a nameless rock, the outermost of a group most happily called the Devil's Teeth. To the Labrador fishermen, bound north from Newfoundland in the spring, bound south, with their loads of green cod, in the fall, it was the Cocked Hat. This name, too, is aptly descriptive; many a schooner,

caught in the breakers, had, as the old proverb hath it, been knocked into that condition, or worse. But to the folk of the immediate coast, and especially of Hulk's Harbour, which lies within sight on the mainland, it was for long known as Feather's Folly.

Old Bill Feather had once been wrecked on the Cocked Hat. The little *Lucky Lass*, bound to Hulk's Harbour from the Hen-and-Chickens, and sunk to the scupper-holes with green fish, had struck in a fog. Four minutes later she had gone down with all hands save Bill. An absent-minded breaker had deposited him high and dry on a ledge of the northeast cliff; needless to say, it was much to Bill's surprise. For five days the castaway had shivered and starved on the barren rock. This was within sight of the chimney-smoke of home—of the harbour tickle, of the cottage roofs; even, in clear weather, of the flakes and stage of his own place.

"It won't happen again," vowed Bill, when they took his lean, sore hulk home.

What Bill did—what he planned and accomplished in the face of ridicule and adverse fortune—earned the rock the name of Feather's Folly in that neighbourhood.

"Anyhow," old Bill was in the habit of repeating, to defend himself, "I 'low it won't happen again. An' I'll *see* that it don't!"

But season followed season, without event; and the Cocked Hat was still known as Feather's Folly.

Billy Topsail was to learn this.

It was early in the spring of the year—too early by half, the old salts said, for Labrador craft to put out from the Newfoundland ports. Thick, vagrant fogs, drifting with the variable winds, were abroad on all the coast; and the Arctic current was spread with drift ice from the upper shores and with great bergs from the glaciers of the far north. But Skipper Libe Tussel, of the thirty-ton *Fish Killer*, hailing from Ruddy Cove, was a firm believer in the fortunes of the early bird; moreover, he was determined that the skipper of the *Cod Trap*, hailing from Fortune, should not this season preëmpt his trap-berth on the Thigh Bone fishing grounds. So the *Fish Killer* was underway for the north, early as it was; and she was cheerily game to face the chances of wind and ice, if only she might beat the *Cod Trap* to the favourable oppor-

tunities of the Thigh Bone grounds off Indian Harbour.

"It's thick," Robinson remarked to the skipper.

"'*Tis* thick."

Billy Topsail, now grown old enough for the adventurous voyage to the Labrador coast, was aboard; and he listened to this exchange with a deal of interest. It was his first fishing voyage; he had been north in the *Rescue*, to be sure, but that was no more than a cruise, undertaken to relieve the starving fishermen of the upper harbours. At last, he was fishing in earnest—really aboard the *Fish Killer*, bound north, there to fish the summer through, in all sorts of weather, with a share in the catch at the end of it! He was vastly delighted by this: for 'twas a man's work he was about, and 'twas a man's work he was wanting to do.

"Thick as mud," said Robinson, with a little shiver.

"'S mud," the skipper responded, in laconic agreement.

And it *was* thick! The fog had settled at mid-day. A fearsome array of icebergs had then been in sight, and the low coast, with the snow still

upon it, had to leeward shone in the brilliant sunlight. But now, with the afternoon not yet on the wane, the day had turned murky and damp. A bank of black fog had drifted in from the open sea. Ice and shore had disappeared. The limit of vision approached, possibly, but did not attain, twenty-five yards. The weather was thick, indeed; the schooner seemed to be winging along through a boundless cloud; and there was a smart breeze blowing, and the circle of sea, in the exact centre of which the schooner floated, was choppy and black.

"Thick enough," Skipper Libe echoed, thoughtfully. "But," he added, "you wouldn't advise heavin' to, would you?"

"No, no!" Robinson exclaimed. "I'm too anxious to get to Indian Harbour."

"And I," muttered the skipper, with an anxious look ahead, "to make the Thigh Bone grounds. But——"

"Give her all the wind she'll carry," said Robinson. "It won't bother me."

"I thinks," the skipper continued, ignoring the interruption, "that I'll shorten sail. For," said he, "I'm thinkin' the old girl might bleed at the nose if she happened t' bump a berg."

While the crew reduced the canvas, Robinson went below. He was the Hudson's Bay Company's agent at Dog Arm of the Labrador, which is close to Indian Harbour. In January, with his invalid daughter in a dog-sled, he had journeyed from that far place to Desolate Bay of Newfoundland, and thence by train to St. John's. It had been a toilsome, dangerous, incredibly bitter experience. But he had forgotten that, nor had he ever complained of it; his happiness was that his child had survived the surgeons' operation, had profited in ease and hope, had already been restored near to her old sunny health. Early in the spring, word of the proposed sailing of the *Fish Killer* from Ruddy Cove had come to him at St. John's; and he had taken passage with Skipper Libe, no more, it must be said, because he wished Mary's mother to know the good news (she had had no word since his departure) than because he was breathlessly impatient once more to be serving the company's interests at Dog Arm.

To Mary and her father Skipper Libe had with seamanlike courtesy abandoned the tiny cabin. The child was lying in the skipper's own berth—warmly covered, comfortably tucked in,

provided with a book to read by the light of the swinging lamp.

"Are you happy, dear?" her father asked.

"Oh, yes!"

The man took the child's hand. "I'm sometimes sorry," he said, "that we didn't wait for the mail-boat. The *Fish Killer* is a pretty tough craft for a little girl to be aboard."

"Sorry?" was the instant response, made with a little smile. "I'm not. I'm glad. Isn't Cape Grief close to leeward? Well, then, father, we're half way home. Think of it! *We're—half—way—home!*"

The father laughed.

"And we might have been waiting at St. John's," the child continued, her blue eyes shining. "Oh, father, I'd rather be aboard the *Fish Killer* off Grief Head than in the very best room of the Crosbie Hotel. Half way home!" she repeated. "Half way home!"

"Half way is a long way."

"But it's half way!"

"On this coast," the father sighed, "no man is home until he gets there."

"It's a fair wind."

"And the fog as thick as mud."

"But they've reefed the mains'l; they've stowed the stays'l; they've got the tops'l down. Haven't you heard them? I've been listening——"

"*What's that!*" Robinson cried.

It was a mere ejaculation of terror. He had no need to ask the question. Even Mary knew well enough what had happened. The *Fish Killer* had struck an iceberg bow on. The shock; the crash forward; the clatter of a falling topmast; the cries on deck: these things were alive with the fearful information.

CHAPTER XXII

The Crew of the Fish Killer Finds Refuge on an Iceberg, and Discovers Greater Safety Elsewhere, after Which the Cook is Mistaken for a Fool, but puts the Crew to Shame

ROBINSON caught the child from the berth. He paused—it was an instinct born of Labrador experience—to wrap a blanket about her, though she was clothed for the day. She reminded him quietly that she would catch cold without her cap; and this he snatched in passing. Then he was on deck—in the midst of a litter from aloft and of a vast confusion of terrified cries.

Before she struck, the *Fish Killer* had ascended a gently shelving beach of ice, washed smooth by the sea. There she hung precariously. Her stern was low, so low that the choppy sea came aboard and swamped the cabin; and the bow was high on the ice. Her bowsprit was in splinters, her topmast on deck, her spliced mainmast tottering; she was the bedraggled wreck of a craft.

Beyond, the berg towered into the fog, stretched into the fog; only a broken wall of blue-

white ice was visible. The butt of the bowsprit overhung a wide ledge. To scramble to the shattered extremity, to hang by the hands, to drop to safe foothold : this would all have been easy for children. The impulse was to seek the solid berg in haste before the schooner had time to fall away and sink.

Robinson ran forward.

"Got that kid?" Skipper Libe demanded. "Ah, you has! Billy Topsail!" he roared.

Billy answered.

"Get ashore on that ice!" the skipper ordered.

Billy ran out on the broken bowsprit and dropped to the berg. He looked back expectantly.

"Take the kid!"

A push sent Robinson on the same road. He dropped Mary into Billy's waiting arms. Then he, too, looked back for orders.

"Ashore with you!"

Robinson swung by the hands and dropped. Before he let go his hands he had felt the vessel quiver and begin to recede from her position.

"Now, men," said the skipper, "grub! She'll be off in a minute."

Every man of them leaped willingly to the im-

perative duty. The food was in the forecastle and hold; they disappeared. Skipper Libe kept watch on deck. With the waves restless beneath her stern, the schooner was perilously insecure. She was gradually working her way back to the sea. The briefest glance below had already assured Skipper Libe that her timbers were hopelessly sprung.

She was old—rotten with age and hard service. The water was pouring in forward and amidships; it ran aft in a flood, contributing its weight to the vessel's inclination to slip away from the berg. It was slow in the beginning, this retreat; but through every moment the movement was accelerated. Five minutes—four—three: in a space too brief to be counted upon she would be wallowing in the sea.

"Haste!" the skipper screamed.

Waiting was out of the question. The *Fish Killer* was about to drop into the sea. Though the men had but tumbled into the forecastle—though as yet they had had no time to seize the food of which to-morrow would find them in desperate need—the skipper roared the order to return.

"Ashore! Ashore!" he shouted.

They came back more willingly, more expeditiously, than they had gone; and they came back empty-handed. Not a man among them had so much as a single biscuit.

"Jim!" said the skipper.

With that, Jim Tall, the cook, clambered out on the bowsprit. The others of the crew waited, each with an anxious eye upon the skipper.

"Bill!"

No sooner was Jim Tall at the end of the bowsprit than Bill was underway. The skipper grimly watched his terrified progress.

"Jack!"

In turn, Jack Sop scrambled out and dropped to the berg. The schooner was fast receding from the ledge. Alexander Budge, John Swan, Archibald Mann, completing the fishing crew, with the exception of Tom Watt, the first hand, and the skipper, won the ice.

"Now, Tom!" said the skipper.

"You, sir!"

"Tom!" Skipper Libe roared; and you may be sure that Tom Watt waited no longer.

Only the skipper was left. The change from his passive attitude—from his unbending, reposeful attitude, with a hand carelessly laid on the

windlass—was so sudden and unequivocal that Jim Tall, the cook, who was ever the wag of the crew, startled even himself with laughter. It was instant. Skipper Libe in a flash turned from a petrified man into a terrified and marvellously agile monkey. He bounded for the bowsprit, nimbly ran the broken length of it, and there stood swaying. The vessel was now so far from the ledge, and so fast receding, that he paused. Delay had but one issue. This was so apparent that horror tied the tongues of the crew. Not a cry of warning was uttered. The situation was too intense, too brief, for utterance.

"Tom," said the skipper to the first hand, "catch!"

He leaped.

"Skipper," said Tom Watt, in the uttermost confusion, an instant later, "glad t' see you! Come in! You isn't a minute too early."

In this way, proceeding with admirable self-possession, the souls aboard the *Fish Killer* jumped from the frying-pan. Whether or not it was into the fire was not for a moment in doubt. When the schooner had once fairly reached the sea, which immediately happened, she sank. They saw her waver, slowly settle, disappear;

when her topmast went tottering under water the end had come.

Whatever may be said of a frying-pan, nobody can accuse the crew of the *Fish Killer* of having come within reach of a fire. Aboard the berg it was cold—awfully cold. Icebergs carry an atmosphere of that sort even into the Gulf Stream; they radiate cold so effectively that the captains of steamers take warning and evade them. It was cold—very, very cold. There was nothing to temper the numbing bitterness of the situation. And what the night might bring could only be surmised.

Though they were born to lives of hardship and peril, though they had long been used to the chances of the sea, not one of the castaways had ever before fallen into a predicament so barren of hope. Flung on an iceberg, adrift on the wild North Atlantic, derelict where no ships passed, at the mercy of the capricious winds, without food or fire: there seemed to be no possibility of escape. But for a time they did not despair; and, moreover, for a time each felt it a high duty to make light of the situation, to joke of cold-storage and polar bears, that the spirits of the oth-

ers might be encouraged. As dusk approached, however, the ghastly humour failed. Ruin, agony, grief, imminent death; in the moody silence, they dwelt, rather, upon these things.

It was not yet dark when a faint shock, a hardly perceptible shiver, a crash from aloft, a subsiding rumble, apprised the castaways of a portentous change of condition.

"What's that, now?" growled the cook.

It was a cruelly anxious moment. Only the event itself would determine whether or not the berg was to turn turtle. They waited.

"She's grounded, I 'low!" exclaimed the skipper.

There was no further disturbance. Whatever had happened, the equilibrium of the berg had been maintained.

"I'm thinkin'," said the skipper, "that I'll take a little look about."

The skipper's "little look about" developed what appeared to be a saving opportunity. The berg had grounded; it had also jammed a wandering pack of drift-ice against the land. What that shore was, whether mainland or island, the skipper did not wait to ascertain; it was sufficient for him to know that the survivors of the

Fish Killer might escape from a disintegrating berg to solid ground.

He returned, breathless, with the enlivening news; and in lively fashion, which almost approached a panic, the castaways abandoned the berg. It was a hard, painful, dangerous scramble, made in the failing light, and the cook had an unwelcome bath in the icy water between two pans; but it had a successful issue. Before dark, they were all ashore—more hopeful, now, than they had been, but still staring death in the face.

So curious was Skipper Libe that, taking advantage of the last of the light, he set out to discover the character of the refuge. He returned discouraged.

"'Tis but a rock," said he. "'Tis no more than a speck o' land."

Then night fell. Robinson's little daughter was by this time on the point of succumbing to the exposure. Cold, hunger and despair had reduced her to a pitiable silence. She was in the extremity of physical exhaustion. They made a deep hollow in the snow in the shelter of a declivity of rock; and there they bestowed her, gladly yielding their jackets to provide her

with such comfort as they could. But this was small mitigation of the hardship. The child was still hopeless and cold. It was sadly apparent that she could not survive the night. And Robinson knew that to-morrow and to-morrow—a long stretch of days—lay before them all. There was no hope for a frail body; weakness was death. In his heart he frankly admitted that he was about to lose his child.

He lay down beside her. "Mary, dear," he pleaded, "don't give up!"

She pressed his hand.

"Don't give up!" he repeated.

A wan smile came and went. "I can't help it," she whispered.

Skipper Libe and his men withdrew. It was now near midnight. The fog was lifting. Stars twinkled in patches of black sky. Low towards the seaward horizon the moon was breaking through the clouds.

Suddenly the cook sat bolt upright. "Skipper," he demanded, "where is we?"

"On the Devil's Teeth."

"An' what rock's this?"

"This?"

"Ay—*this!*"

"I'd not be s'prised," the skipper answered, "if 'tis what they calls the Cocked Hat."

"Feather's Folly!" roared the cook.

"Which?" said the skipper, suspiciously.

The cook was on his feet—dancing in glad excitement. "Feather's Folly!" he shouted "Feather's Folly!"

"Catch un!" said the skipper, quietly. "He've gone mad."

They set upon the poor cook. Before he could escape they had him fast. He was tripped, thrown, sat upon.

"Don't let him up," the skipper warned. "He'll do hisself hurt. Poor man!" he sighed. "He've lost his senses."

"Mad!" screamed the cook. "*You're* mad. Feather's Folly! We're saved!"

"Hold un tight," said the skipper.

But the cook was not to be held. He wriggled free and bolted. Billy Topsail and all took after him, the skipper in the lead; and by the dim, changing light of that night he led them a mad chase over rock and through drifted snow. They pursued, they headed him off, they laid hold of his flying coat-tail; but he eluded them, dodged, sped, doubled. If he were mad, there was method

in his madness. He was searching every square yard of that acre of uneven rock. At last, panting and perspiring, he came to a full stop and turned triumphantly upon his pursuers. He had found what he sought.

"Mad!" he laughed. "Who's mad, now? Eh? Who's crazy?"

The crew stared.

"Who's crazy?" the cook roared. "Look at that! What d'ye make o' that?"

"It looks," the skipper admitted, "like salvation!"

Old man Feather had indeed "seen that it wouldn't happen again." He had provided for castaways on the Cocked Hat. There was a tight little hut in the lee of the Bishop's Nose; within, there were provisions and blankets and fire-wood and candles. Moreover, in the sprawling, misspelled welcome, tacked to the wall, there was even the heartening information that "seegars is in the kityun tabl." The passengers and crew of the *Fish Killer* were soon warm and satisfied. They spent a happy night—a night so changed, so cozy, so bountiful, that they blessed old man Feather until their tongues were tired.

And old man Feather, himself, who kept watch on the Cocked Hat with a spy-glass, took them off to Hulk's Harbour in the clear weather of the next day.

"An' did you find the cigars, skipper?" he whispered, with a wide, proud grin.

"Us did."

"An' was they good? Hist! now," the old fellow repeated, with a wink of mystery, "*wasn't* they good?"

"Well," the skipper drawled, not ungraciously, you may be sure, "the cook made bad weather of it. But he double-reefed hisself an' lived through. 'Twas the finest an' the first cigar he ever seed."

The old man chuckled delightedly.

CHAPTER XXIII

In Which the Clerk of the Trader Tax Yarns of a Madman in the Cabin

THE trading-schooner *Tax* of Ruddy Cove had come down from the Labrador. She was riding at anchor in the home harbour, with her hold full of salt fish and the goods in her cabin run sadly low. Billy Topsail, safely back from Feather's Folly, and doomed by the wreck of the *Fish Killer* to spend the summer in the quieter pursuits of Ruddy Cove, had gone aboard to greet the crew. There was hot tea on the forecastle table, and the crew was yarning to a jolly, brown grinning lot of Ruddy folk, who had come aboard. It was Cook, the clerk, a merry, blue-eyed little man, who told the story of the madman in the cabin.

"We were lying in Shelter Harbour," said he, "waiting for a fair wind to Point-o'-Bay. It was coming close to night when they saw him leaping along shore and kicking a tin kettle as though 'twas a football. I was in the cabin, putting the stock to rights after the day's trade.

I heard the hail and the skipper's answering, 'Ay ay! This is the trader *Tax* from Ruddy Cove.' Then the skipper sung out to know if I wanted a customer. Customer? To be sure I wanted one!

"'If he has a gallon of oil or a pound of fish,' said I, 'fetch him aboard.'

"'He looks queer,' said the skipper.

"'Queer he may look,' said I, 'and queer he may be, but his fish will be first cousins to the ones in the hold, and I'll barter for them.'

"With that the skipper put off in the punt to fetch the customer; but when he drew near shore he lay on his oars, something puzzled, I'm thinking, for the customer was dancing a hornpipe on a flat rock at the water's edge, by the first light of the moon.

"'Have you got a fish t' trade?' said the skipper.

"'Good-evenin', skipper, sir,' said the queer customer, after a last kick and flourish. 'I've a quintal or two an' a cask o' oil that I'm wantin' bad t' trade away.'

"He was rational as you please; so the skipper was thrown off his guard, took him aboard, and pulled out.

"'You're quite a dancer,' said he.

"'Hut!' said the man. 'That's nothin' at all. When the moon's full an' high, sir, I dances over the waves; an' when they's a gale blowin' I goes aloft t' the clouds an' shakes a foot up there.'

"'Do you, now?' said the skipper, not knowing whether to take this in joke or earnest.

"'Believe *me*, sir,' said the man, with the gravest of faces, 'I'm a wonderful dancer.'

"I was on deck when they came aboard. It was then dusk. I noticed nothing out of the ordinary in my customer's appearance. He was a large, big-boned man, well supplied with fat and muscle, and capable, as I thought at the moment, of enduring all the toil and hardship to which the men of that coast are exposed. The skipper handed him over to me without a word of warning, and went below to the forecastle, for the wind was blowing cold and misty."

"Oh, well," the skipper broke in from his place in a bunk, "how could I tell that he was mad?"

"Whatever, Skipper Job," the clerk resumed, with a twinkle in his eye, "I took him into the cabin, and the crew and you were snug enough in the forecastle, where no hail of mine could reach you. It was not until then," he resumed, "when

the light of the cabin lamp fell full upon him, that I had a proper appreciation of my customer's size and strength—not until then that I marked the deathly pallour of his face and the strange light in his eyes. He was frowsy, dirty, dressed in ragged moleskin cloth; and he had a habit of looking to right and left and aloft—anywhere, it appeared, but straight in my face—so that I caught no more than a red flash from his eyes from time to time. I felt uneasy, without being able to account to myself for the feeling; so, anxious to be well rid of him, I asked, abruptly, in what I could serve him.

"'I'm thinkin' you'll not be havin' the thing I wants,' said he.

"That touched me on a tender spot. 'I'm thinking,' said I, 'that we've a little of all that you ever thought of.'

"'I don't think you has,' said he, 'but 'twould be best for you if you had.'

"There was a hidden meaning in that. Why should it be best for me?

"'And what is it?' said I.

"''Tis a spool o' silk thread,' said he, soberly, 't' bind the fairies with—the wicked fairies that tells me t' do the things I don't want t'. If you've

any o' *that*, sir, I'll take all you got aboard, for I wants it bad.'

"'Come, now, my man,' said I sharply, 'stop your joking. I'm tired, and in no humour for it. What is it you want?'

"'I'm not jokin', sir,' said he. 'I wants a spool o' green silk thread t' lash the wicked fairies t' the spruce trees.'

"I could not doubt him longer; there was too much longing, too much hopelessness, in his voice for that. He was demented; but there are many men of that coast whom lonely toil has driven mad, but yet who live their lives through to the natural end, peaceable folk and good fishermen, and I thought that this poor fellow had as good a right to trade with me as the sanest man in Shelter Harbour.

"'We've no green silk thread, sir,' said I, 'that will securely lash fairies to spruce trees. But if you want anything else, and have fish to trade, I'll take them.'

"'I wisht you had the thread,' said he.

"'Why?' said I.

"''Twould be best for you,' said he with a sigh. 'If I could tie the wicked fairies up, I wouldn't have t'—have t'—do it. But,' he went

on, 'as you haven't any thread, I'll take some calico t' make a new dress for my brother's little maid.'

"A certain look of cunning, which overspread his face at that moment, alarmed me. I thought I had better find out what the wicked fairies had to do with me.

"'Did you meet the fairies to-night?' said I.

"'Ay,' said he. 'I met the crew o' wicked ones on my way through the bush.'

"'And what did they tell you?' said I.

"He signed to me to be silent; then he closed the cabin door and came close to the counter, behind which I stood, with no way of escape open.

"'Has you got a loaded gun?' he whispered hoarsely.

"His face was close to mine. In his eyes, which were now steady, two live, red coals were glowing. I fell back from him, frightened; for I now knew what work the wicked fairies had assigned to him for that night. Poor fellow! Frightened though I was, I pitied him. I saw his distress, and pitied him! He was fighting manfully against the impulse; but it mastered him, at last, and I realized that my life was in grave danger. I was penned in, you know, and

—they call me 'little Cook'—I was no match for him.

"'No,' said I. 'I've no gun.'

"'Has you got a knife?' said he.

"'Sorry,' said I; 'but I'm sold out of knives.'

"'Has you got a razor?' said he.

"It was high time to mislead him. I saw an opportunity to escape.

"'Is it razors you want?' I cried. 'Sure, I've some grand ones—big ones, boy, sharp ones, bright ones. I keep them in the forecastle where 'tis dry. So I'll just run up to fetch the lot to show you.'

"His eyes glistened when I spoke of the brightness and sharpness of those razors. With a show of confidence, I jumped on the counter and swung my legs over. But he pushed me back—so angrily, indeed, that I feared to precipitate the encounter if I persisted.

"'Don't trouble, sir,' said he. 'I'll find something that'll answer. Ha!' said he, taking an axe from the rack and 'hefting' it. 'This will do.'

"'But I'm wanting to wash my hands, anyway,' said I.

"''Twill make no difference in the end,' said he quietly.

"I speak of it calmly now; but when I found myself alone in the cabin with that poor madman —found myself behind the counter, with no defensive weapon at hand, with my life in the care of my wits, which are neither sharp nor ready— I was in no condition for calm thought. To hail the skipper was out of the question; he would not hear me, and the first shout would doubtless excite the big man in the moleskin clothes beyond restraint. My hope of escape lay in distracting his attention from the matter in hand until the skipper should come aft of his own notion. But I made one effort in another direction.

"'Did you say *green* silk thread or *blue?*' said I.

"'I said green, sir.'

"'Did you, now?' I exclaimed. 'Sure, I thought you said blue. We've no blue, but we've the green, and you'll be able to lash the fairies to the spruce trees, after all.'

"As a matter of fact, we had a few spools of silk thread, and one of them was green—a bad stock, as I knew to my cost, for I had long been trying to dispose of them.

"''Tis too late,' said he.

"'No, no!' said I. 'You'll surely not be letting

the fairies drive you like that. You can take the green thread and lash them all up on the way home.'

"'No,' he said doggedly; ''tis too late. What they told me to do I must do before the clock strikes.'

"'Strikes what?' said I.

"'Twelve,' said he.

"With what relief did I hear this! Twelve o'clock? It was now but eight. The skipper would come aft long before that hour.

"''Tis a long time to wait,' said I. 'I'll make up my bunk, and you may lie down a bit and rest.'

"'It lacks but twelve minutes of the hour,' said he. 'They's a clock hangin' behind you, sir.'

" He indicated a cheap American alarm clock. It was the last of a half dozen I had kept hanging from the roof of the cabin. I had kept them wound up, for the mere pleasure of hearing their busy ticking, but had never set them—never troubled to keep them running to the right time. When I looked up I was dismayed to find that the clock pointed to twelve minutes to twelve o'clock!

"'Tis not the right time,' I began. 'Tis far too——'

"'Hist!' said he. 'Don't speak. You've but eleven minutes left.'

"Thus we stood, the fisherman with his back to the door and the axe in his hand, and myself behind the counter, while the cheap American alarm clock ticked off the minutes of my life. Eleven—ten—nine! They were fast flying. I could think of no plan to dissuade him—no ruse to outwit him. Indeed, my mind was occupied more with putting the blame on that lying clock than with anything else. I had determined, of course, to make the best fight I could—to blow out the light at the moment of attack, dive under the counter, catch my man by the legs, overturn him and escape by the door or there fight it out. Nine minutes—eight—seven! At that moment I caught a long hail from the shore.

"'Schooner ahoy! Ahoy!'

"I do not think the fisherman heard it. It was too faint—too far off; and he was too intent upon the thing he was to do.

"'Six minutes, sir,' said he.

"I wondered if Job had heard. The hail was repeated. Then I heard Skipper Job answer

from the deck. At that the fisherman started; but his alarm passed in a moment.

"'Ahoy!' shouted Skipper Job.

"'Has you got a strange man aboard?' came from the shore.

"'Yes, sir,' Job called.

"'Watch him,' from the shore. 'He's mad.'

"'Oh, he's all right,' Job called. 'He's harmless.'

"Then silence. My hope of relief vanished. I should have to make the fight, after all, I thought.

"'Five minutes, sir,' said the madman.

"Had Skipper Job gone below again? Or would he come aft? For two minutes not a word was said. My customer and I were waiting for the first stroke of twelve. Soon I heard voices forward; then the tramp of feet coming aft over the deck—treading softly. They paused by the house, and the whispering ceased. Was it a rescue, or was it not? I could not tell. The men above seemed to have no concern with me. But, indeed, they had.

"'John, b'y,' a strange voice called, 'is you below?'

"'Tis me brother Timothy,' my customer whispered. 'I must be goin' home.'

"'John, b'y, is you below?'

"'Ay, Timothy!'

"'Come up, b'y. I'm goin' ashore now, an' 'tis time you was in bed.'

"My customer put up the axe, and, with a sign to me to keep silence, went on deck, with me following. He jumped in the punt, as docile as a child, gave us all good-night, and was rowed ashore. We did not see him again; for the wind blew fresh from the nor'west in the morning, and by night we were anchored at Point-o'-Bay. Whether or not the fairies had commanded the poor fellow to kill me at twelve o'clock, I do not know. He did not say so; but I think they had."

CHAPTER XXIV

In Which a Pirate's Cave grows Interesting, and Two Young Members of the Ethnological and Antiquarian Club of St. John's, Undertake an Adventure under the Guidance of Billy Topsail

THERE landed in Ruddy Cove, that summer, two youngsters from St. John's on a vacation—city schoolboys both: not fisher lads. They were pleasant fellows, and were soon fast friends with Billy Topsail and the lads of the place, by whom they were regarded with some awe, but still with great friendliness.

"Hello!" the visitors exclaimed, when they clapped eyes on Billy. "Where you going?"

"Fishin'."

"Take us, won't you, please?"

Billy Topsail grinned.

"Won't you?"

"I don't know," said Billy. "I 'low so."

They went to the grounds; and the day was blue, and the sea was quiet, and Billy Topsail and the schoolboys had a marvellously splendid time; so they were all friends together from that out.

Tom Call and Jack Wither were members of what they called, with no little pride, "The Ethnological and Antiquarian Club of St. John's." The object of this club of lads was, in the beginning, to preserve relics of the exterminated Beothuk tribe; but to the little collections of stone implements and flint-lock guns were soon added collections of mineral specimens, of fossils, of stamps, of fish and shells and sea-weeds, of insects, of old prints and documents—in short, of everything to which an inveterate collector might attach a value.

Wherever they went in the long vacation, whether to the coast or to the interior, not one of them but kept an eye open for additions to the club collections; and, though much of what they brought back had to be rejected, it was not long before they had the gratification of observing an occasional reference to "the collections of the Ethnological and Antiquarian Club" in the city newspapers.

All this accounts for the presence of Tom Call and Jack Wither in the Little Tickle Basin, in the thick of the islands off Ruddy Cove, one vacation day, and for their interest in a rusted iron mooring-ring, which was there sunk in the rock.

"And nobody knows who put it there?" Tom asked, curiously fingering the old ring.

"No," replied Billy Topsail, who had taken them over; "but they says 'twas the pirates put it there, long ago."

"Pirates!" cried Tom. "Do they say that?"

"'Twas me grandfather told me so."

It may be that pirates harboured in the Little Tickle Basin in the days when they made the Caribbean Sea a fearsome place to sail upon. When the Newfoundland coast was remote, uninhabited, uncharted, no safer hiding place could have been found than that quiet little basin, hidden away among the thousand barren islands of the bay. If, as they say, every pirate had his place of refuge, the iron ring is some evidence, at least, that a buccaneer was accustomed to fly to the basin when pursuit got too persistent and too hot for him.

"Of course!" said Tom, when they were sailing back to Ruddy Cove. "How else can you account for that ring? I bet you," he concluded, "that dozens of pirates had dens on this coast."

"Now, Tom," said Jack, "you know as well as I do that that's just a little too ——"

"Well," he interrupted, "everybody knows

that pirates used to come here. You'll find it in the histories. It wouldn't surprise me to learn that there is a cave around here."

"There is," said Billy Topsail.

"There!" cried Tom, his eyes shining. "I told you so!"

"'Tis a wonderful curious place, too," Billy went on. "You has t' crawl through a hole t' get inside. Sure, the hole is no bigger than a scuttle. You could close it with a fair sized rock. But once you gets through, the cave is as big as a room. 'Twould hold a score o' men very comfortable."

Tom gave Jack a meaning glance. Then he turned to Billy Topsail.

"Can you take us there?" he asked.

"I don't know as I could. I've only *heered tell* they was a cave like that."

"And you've never been there?"

"Not me."

Tom's face fell—fell so suddenly and to an expression so woeful that Jack laughed outright, though he sympathized with Tom's disappointment.

"But I knows a man that *has* been there," Billy continued. "He's the man that found it.

'Tis like, now, that he's the only man that's ever been inside."

"Then the place isn't well known?"

"So far as I can tell, nobody knows it but ol' Joe West."

When they ran Billy's punt to old Joe West's stage, at Ruddy Cove, that night, Joe was inside, splitting the day's catch of cod. They broached the object of their visit without delay. Would he guide them to the cave at Little Tickle Basin? But Joe shook his head. The squid were in the harbour, and the fish were taking the bait in lively fashion. The loss of a day's catch was "beyond thinkin' of."

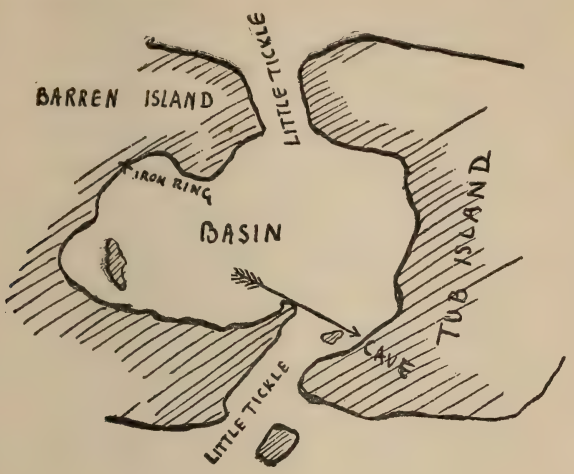
"Do you know the bearings?" Tom asked.

"T' be sure. 'Tis very simple t' get near the spot; but 'tis wonderful hard t' find the hole. 'Tis all overgrown. You might hunt for a year, I'm thinkin', an' never find it. When you does find it, it takes a deal o' nerve t' crawl in. 'Tis that dark an' damp! You keeps thinkin' all the time, too, that something will fall over the hole an' shut you in. If you crawls through," Joe concluded, impressively, "be sure one o' you stays outside."

"But we've no chart of the place," Tom complained.

"If you've paper an' a bit o' pencil," said Skipper Joe, "I'll draw you one."

Here is what he drew:



Skipper Joe, of course, carefully explained his drawing. "Does you see where the arrow points?" said he. "Well, 'tis there. You gets the head o' that little rock in line with the point, at high water, an' there you are. The cliff is rough, an' covered with a growth o' spruce. The hole is about half way up, openin' off a mossy ledge. You'll have t' pry around a wonderful lot t' find it."

"What's it like inside?" Tom asked, eagerly.

"Well, they is a deal o' birch bark scattered around, an' a lot o' broken rock. I saw that by the light of a match; but I was too scared t' stay long, an' I haven't never been there since."

Billy Topsail agreed to sail the sloop to Little Tickle Basin on the next day. Then the boys walked home by the road, much excited. Indeed, Tom, who was of an imaginative and enthusiastic turn, was fairly transported. No flight of fancy was too high for him—no hope too wild. The chart passed from his hand to Jack's and back again a hundred times. The crude, strange drawing, with its significant arrow, touched all the pirate tales with reality.

"If it had been only a cave, without a rusted mooring-ring, it wouldn't have been so much," said Tom. "But with the ring—*with* the ring, my boy—a narrow, hidden passage to a cave means a great deal more."

Jack asked Tom what he was "driving at."

"I think," said he calmly, "that there is buried treasure there."

Jack scoffed.

"Very well," said Tom; "but you must remember that these discoveries come unexpectedly.

They're *stumbled* on. You can't expect to find a sign-post near buried treasure."

That night they lay awake for a long time. Tom and Jack were bed-fellows at Ruddy Cove. Struck by a simple idea, Jack awoke his friend.

"Tom," said he, "I think we'll find something there."

"Spanish gold or English?" Tom asked, sleepily.

"It will be *something*," Jack replied. "Something we want."

CHAPTER XXV

In Which There is a Landside at Little Tickle Basin and Something of Great Interest and Peculiar Value is Discovered in the Cave

NOON of the next day found the three boys at Little Tickle Basin, with the punt moored to the mysterious ring. Many a vessel had floated in that snug berth before, no doubt. But whose? And what flag did they fly? When the tide was at the full, the boys set off across the basin in the punt; and they were soon ashore, with the head of the little rock in line with the point of land, as the chart directed.

"Now for it!" cried Tom.

And up the cliff he started, Jack following, with Billy Topsail, who was quite as deeply stirred as they, bringing up the rear, a pick in one hand and a shovel in the other. It was not hard climbing. The declivity could hardly be called a cliff. Rather, it was a hill, rising sharply from the water's edge—steep, strewn with broken rock, loose turf and decaying stumps, and over-

grown with moss and ill-nourished shrubs. Jack was impressed with the instability of the whole mass.

"If it weren't for the juts of naked rock," he thought, with some alarm, "this stuff would all slip into the water, like snow from the roof of a house."

But he was far too deeply interested in the search to dwell upon such speculation, however threateningly the imagination might present the possibilities. They all kept to the perpendicular line, from their landing place to the crest of the hill; and they searched painstakingly, tearing aside the shrubs, peering under overhanging rocks, prying into dark holes. It was all without reward. At last, Jack came to the top of the hill. Tom was below him, following a narrow ledge; and Billy Topsail, now wearied of the search, was sitting on a boulder, lower down.

"Hello, Tom!" Jack shouted. "What luck?"

Jack caught hold of a shrub, and leaned outward, in an attempt to catch sight of Tom.

"Nothing yet," Tom answered.

Then Jack's feet, which had been resting on an insecure footing of loose stones, shot from under him. He clung to his shrub and held his posi-

tion, but in the effort he dislodged a small boulder, which went crashing down, dislodging earth and the accumulations of broken rock in its course. He had started a little avalanche; and the most he could do was to cry a horrified warning and watch it go rolling down, growing greater as it went.

"Tom!" he called. "Oh, Tom!"

This time there was no answer. Dead silence followed the frantic call and the plunge of the avalanche into the water. What had become of Tom? Billy Topsail, who had found shelter in the "lee" of the boulder upon which he had been sitting, suggested, when Jack joined him, that Tom had been swept into the water by the flood of stones and earth. Jack scouted the suggestion. Had he not watched the course of that selfsame flood? Tom had been on the ledge. He must still be there—unconscious, probably, and unable to answer to the call of his name.

"We'll look there first, at any rate," he determined.

A great part of the avalanche had lodged on the ledge. Stones and moss and new earth lay in slanting heaps in many places; but of Tom's body there was no sign.

"He've been swep' into the water, I fears," Billy declared.

"Or buried on the ledge," said Jack.

Jack called to his friend again. While they listened, straining their ears for the remotest response, he had his eye fixed on a remnant of the avalanche near by. To his unbounded astonishment, he perceived evidences of some disturbance within the heap. The disturbance suddenly developed into an upheaval. A foot and an ankle shot out. A moment later Billy Topsail had that foot and its mate in his hands and was hauling with small regard for the body behind.

It was Tom.

"I've found the cave!" he gasped, when they had set him on his feet, profusely perspiring, flushed and exceedingly dirty. "But what's up? How did I get shut in there? Part of the hill slipped away! I *thought* it was a landslide. I found the hole, and started to crawl in, to make sure that it was the place before I said anything. Then I heard a racket; and then the light was shut out. I thought I might as well go on, though, and find out afterwards what had happened. So on I went. And it's the cave, boy!" he cried.

"When I made sure of that," he went on, "I wanted to get out in a hurry. I was afraid to crawl into that hole head foremost—afraid of being jammed. Of course, I knew that something had fallen over the mouth of it; and I thought I could kick the thing out of the way just as easily as I could push it, and meantime have all the air there was. So out I came, feet first. Have you got that pick and shovel, Billy? Let's clear this stuff away from the hole and go in."

"What's in there, Tom?" Jack asked.

"You'll soon find out."

They left Billy Topsail outside, as a precaution against entombment. Tom went first with the lantern. When, looking along the passage, Jack saw a flare of light, he followed. The passage was about six feet long, and so narrow that he could not quite go upon hands and knees. He squirmed through, with his heart in his mouth, and found himself, at last, in a roomy chamber, apparently rough-hewn, wherein Tom was dancing about like a wild Indian.

"Pirate gold!" he shouted. "Pirate gold!"

"Where is it?" Jack cried, believing, for the moment, that he had discovered it in sacks.

"Dig, boy!" said Tom. "It's underground."

At any rate, a glance about, by the light of the lantern, discovered no treasure. It was underground, if it were anywhere. So they set about unearthing it without delay. But there was no earth—nothing but broken rock. The shovel was of small use; they took turns with the pick, labouring hard and excitedly, expecting, momentarily, to catch the glitter of gold. Occasionally, the strength of both was needed to lift some great, obstinate stone out of the way; but, for the most part, while one wielded the pick, the other removed the loosened rock.

"What in the world is this thing?" Tom asked.

He had taken a round, brown object from the excavation. Suddenly he let it drop, with a little cry of horror, and started to his feet. Jack picked it up and held it close to the lantern.

"Pirates!" whispered Tom, now utterly horrified.

"Last night," said Jack, "I told you that we'd find *something*. We've found it."

"We've found a pirates' den," said Tom.

"No," Jack replied, handing him the skull; "we've found a Beothuk Indian burial cave.

We've struck it rich for the Ethnological and Antiquarian Club!"

"Well," Tom admitted, ruefully, "that's *something!*"

Struck it rich? Indeed, they had! The most valuable part of the collection of Indian relics, now in the club's museum, came from that cave. The excavation occupied three days; and at the end of it, when they laid their treasures out at Ruddy Cove, they were thrown into a transport of delight. In addition to the skeleton remains, which have since served a highly useful purpose, they had found stone hatchets, knives, spear-heads, clubs, and various other implements of warfare and the hunt; three clay masks, a curious clay figure in human form, and three complete specimens of Indian pottery, with a number of fragments.

The rusted iron mooring-ring has never been explained.

CHAPTER XXVI

In Which Billy Topsail Determines to go to the Ice in the Spring of the Year and Young Archibald Armstrong of St. John's is Permitted to Set Out Upon an Adventure Which Promises to be Perilous but Profitable

IN the winter when he was fifteen years old, Billy Topsail determined to go to the ice with the great sealing fleet in the spring, if it could be managed by hook or crook. His father had no objection to make. The boy was old enough to look out for himself, he knew; and he was sure that the experience would complete the process of making a man of him.

"Go, b'y," said he, "if you can."

There was the difficulty. What sealing captain would take a lad of fifteen when there were grown men to be shipped? Billy was at a loss. But he determined, nevertheless, that he would go to the ice, and selected Long Tom Harbour as a promising port to sail from, for it was near by and well known. From Long Tom Harbour then, he would go seal hunting in the spring of

the year if it could be managed by a boy with courage and no little ingenuity.

"Oh, I'll go *somehow!*" said he.

It was twilight of a blustering February day. Sir Archibald Armstrong, the great St. John's merchant, sat alone in his office, with his chair drawn close to the low, broad window, which overlooked the wharves and the ice-strewn harbour beyond; and while the fire roared and the wind drove the snow against the panes, he lost himself in profound meditation. He stared absently at the swarm of busy men—now almost hidden in the dusk and storm—and at the lights of the sealing fleet, which lay there fitting out for the spring voyage to the drift-ice of the north; but no sound of the activity on deck or dock could disturb the quiet of the little office where the fire blazed and crackled and the snow fell softly against the window panes.

"Beg pardon, sir," a clerk interrupted, putting his head in at the door. "Cap'n Hand, sir."

Captain Hand, of the sealing ship *Dictator*, was admitted. He was a thick, stubby, hammer-fisted, fiery-faced old man, marked with the mark of the sea. His eyebrows made one broad black

band of wiry hair, stretching from temple to temple, where they grew in the fashion of two sharp little horns; and he had a habit of dropping them over his little red eyes, as if in a passion—but nobody was deceived by that; for, save in moments of righteous anger, the light of good humour still shone in the little red eyes, however fiercely they flashed. The rest of his face was beard—a wilderness of gray beard; it sprang from somewhere below his shirt collar, and straggled in a tangled growth over his cheek-bones and neck.

"Report t' you, sir," said he, in a surprisingly gruff voice; and at the same time he pulled the lobe of his right ear, which was his invariable manner of salute.

Sir Archibald and Captain Hand were in close consultation for half an hour; during all of which time the burly captain's eyes were thickly screened by his eyebrows.

"Oh, I sees, sir—I sees," said he, rising, at the end of it. "Oh, ay! Of course, sir—of course!"

"And you'll take good care?" Sir Archibald began, almost tenderly.

"Oh, ay!" heartily. "I ain't no nurse, as I tells you fair; but you needn't worry about *him*, sir."

"His mother will be anxious. She'll hold you responsible, captain."

Captain Hand violently pulled the lobe of his right ear, and turned to go. At the door he halted. "Tim Tuttle o' Raggles Island has turned up again, sir," he said, "an' wants t' be shipped."

"Tuttle?" muttered Sir Archibald. "He's the man who led the mutiny on the *Never Say Die*. Well, as you will, captain."

"Oh, I'll ship him!" said the captain, grimly; and with a last pull at his ear he disappeared.

On the heels of the captain's departure came Archie. He was Sir Archibald's son; there was no doubt about that: a fine, hardy lad—robust, as every young Newfoundlander should be; straight, agile, alert, with head carried high; merry, quick-minded, ready-tongued, fearless in wind and high sea. His hair was tawny, his eyes blue and wide and clear, his face broad and good humoured. All this appeared as he pulled off his cap, threw back the flaps of his fur-lined overcoat, picked a stray thread from his knicker-bockers, and, at last, eagerly approached his father.

"You little dandy!" laughed his father.

Archie laughed, too—and flushed. He knew that his father liked to poke fun at him because the cut of his coat, the knot in his cravat, the polish on his boots, were matters of such deep concern to the boy.

"Oh, come now, father!" he protested. "Tell me whether I'm to go or not."

For reply, Sir Archibald gravely led his son to the window. It was his purpose to impress the boy with the wealth and power (and, therefore, with the responsibilities) of the firm of Armstrong and Son.

"Come," said he; "let us watch them fitting out the fleet."

The wealth of the firm was vast, the power great. Directly or indirectly, Sir Archibald's business interests touched every port in Newfoundland, every cove of the Labrador, the markets of Spain and Portugal, of the West Indies and South American Republics. His fishing-schooners went south to the Banks and north to the gray, cold seas off Cape Chidley; the whalers gave chase in the waters of the Gulf and of the Straits; the traders ran from port to port of all that rugged coast; the barques carried cod and salmon and oil to all the markets of the

world. And when the ice came drifting down in the spring, the sealers scattered themselves over the waters of the North Atlantic.

Archie looked into the dusk without, where lay the ships and wharves and warehouses that told the story.

"They are mine," said Sir Archibald, gravely, looking deep into his son's wide-opened eyes. "Some day ——"

Archie was alarmed. What did it all mean? Why was his father so grave? Why had he boasted of his wealth?

"They will be yours," Sir Archibald concluded. After a pause, he continued: "The firm has had an honourable career through three generations of our family. My father gave it to me with a spotless reputation. More than that, with the business he gave me the perfect faith of every man, woman and child of the outports. The firm has dealt with its fishermen and sealers as man with man; it has never wronged, or oppressed, or despised them. You are now fifteen years old. In September, you are going to an English public school, and thence to an English university. You will meet with new ideals. The warehouses and ships, the fish and fat, will not mean so much

to you. You will forget. It may be, even—for you are something of a dandy, you know—that you will be ashamed to acknowledge that your father is a dealer in fish and seal-oil; that——"

Archie drew breath to speak.

"But I want you *to remember*," Sir Archibald went on, lifting his hand. "I want you to know a man when you meet one, whatever the clothes he wears. The men upon whom the fortunes of this firm are founded are true men. They are strong, and brave, and true. Their work is toilsome and perilous, and their lives are not unused to deprivation; but they are cheerful, and independent, and fearless, through it all—stout hearts, every one of them! They deserve respectful and generous treatment at the hands of their employers. For that reason I want you to know them more intimately—to know them as shipmates know one another—that you may be in sympathy with them. I am confident that you will respect them, because I know that you love all manly qualities. And so, for your good, and for their good, and for the good of the firm, I have decided that you may——"

"That I may go?" Archie cried, eagerly.

"With Captain Hand, of the *Dictator*, which puts out from Long Tom Harbour at midnight of March tenth."

CHAPTER XXVII

While Billy Topsail is About His Own Business Archie Armstrong Stands on the Bridge of the Dictator and Captain Hand Orders "Full Speed Ahead!" on the Stroke of Twelve.

AND so it came to pass that, at near midnight of the tenth of March, Archie Armstrong, warmly clad in furs, and fairly on fire with excitement, was aboard the staunch old sealer, at Long Tom, half way up the east coast. It was blowing half a gale from the open sea, which lay, hidden by the night, just beyond the harbour rocks. The wind was stinging cold, as though it had swept over immense areas of ice, dragging the sluggish fields after it. It howled aloft, rattled over the decks, and flung the smoke from the funnel into the darkness inland. Archie breasted it with the captain and the mate on the bridge; and he was impatient as they to be off from the sheltered water, fairly started in the race for the north, though a great gale was to be weathered.

"Good-bye, Skipper John," he had said to John Roth, with whom he had spent the three

days of waiting in this small outport. "I'll send you two white-coats (young seals) for Aunt Mary's sitting room, when I get back."

"I be past me labour, b'y," replied John, who was, indeed, now beyond all part in the great spring harvest, "but I'll give you the toast o' the old days. 'Red decks, an' many o' them!'"

"Red decks," cried Archie, quoting the old proverb, "make happy homes."

"'Tis that," said old John, striking the ground with his staff. "An' I wish I was goin' along with you, b'y. There's no sealin' skipper like Cap'n Hand."

The ship was now hanging off shore, with steam up and the anchor snugly stowed. Not before the stroke of twelve of that night was it permitted by the law to clear from Long Tom. Fair play was thus assured to all, and the young seals were protected from an untimely attack. It was a race from all the outports to the ice, with the promise of cargoes of fat to stiffen courage and put a will for work in the hearts of men: for a good catch, in its deeper meaning, is like a bounteous harvest; and what it brings to the wives and little folk in all the cottages of that cruel coast is worth the hardship and peril.

"What's the time, Mr. Ackell?" said the captain to the mate, impatiently.

"Lacks forty-three minutes o' the hour, sir," was the reply.

"Huh!" growled the captain. "'Tis wonderful long in passin'."

"The whole harbour must be down to see the start," Archie observed looking to the shore.

"More nor that, b'y," said the captain. "I've got a Green Bay crew. Most two hundred men o' them, an' every last one o' them a mighty man. They's folk here from all the harbours o' the bay t' see us off. Hark t' the guns they're firin'!"

All the folk left in Long Tom—the women and children and old men—were at the water-side; with additions from Morton's Harbour, Burnt Bay, Exploits and Fortune Harbour. Sailing day for the sealers! It was the great event of the year. Torches flared on the flakes and at the stages all around the harbour. The cottages were all illuminated with tallow candles. Guns were discharged in salute. "God speed!" was shouted from shore to ship; and you may be sure that the crew was not slow to return the good wishes. Archie marked one man in particular—a tall, lean

fellow, who was clinging to the main shrouds, and shouting boisterously.

"Well, we can't lose Tuttle," said the mate, with a grin, indicating the man in the shrouds.

The captain frowned; and Archie wondered why. But he thought no more of the matter at the moment—nor, indeed, until he met Tuttle face to face—for the wind was now blowing high; and that was enough to think of.

"Let it blow," said bluff Captain Hand. "'Tis not the *wind* I cares about, b'y. 'Tis the ice. I reckon there's a field o' drift ice offshore. This nor'east gale will jam the harbour in an hour, an' I don't want t' be trapped here. What's the time, now, Mr. Ackell?"

"Twenty-seven minutes yet, sir."

"Take her up off Skull Head. That's within the law."

The drift ice was coming in fast. There was a small field forming about the steamer, and growing continuously. Out to sea, the night-light now revealed a floe advancing with the wind, threatening to seal tight the narrow harbour entrance.

"If we have t' cut our way out," muttered the captain, "we'll cut as little as we can. Mr.

Girth!" he roared to the second mate, "get the bombs out. An' pick a crew that knows how t' use 'em."

The *Dictator* moved forward through the gathering ice towards Skull Head; and the three other steamers, whose owners had chosen to make the start from Long Tom, followed slyly on her heels, evidently hoping to get to sea in her wake, for she was larger than they. When her engines were stopped off the Head, it lacked twelve minutes of sailing time. An unbroken field of ice lay beyond the harbour entrance, momentarily jammed there. Would the ship be locked in?

"Can't we run for it, sir?" asked the mate. "'Tis but seven minutes too soon."

"No," said the captain. "We'll lie here t' midnight t' the second. Then we'll ram that floe, if we have t'. Hear me?" he burst out, such was the tension upon patience. "We'll ram it! We'll ram it!"

It appeared that they *would* have to. Archie could hear the ice crunching as the floe pressed in upon the jam. Pans were lifted out of the water, and, under the mighty force of the mass behind, were heaped up between the rocks

on either side of the narrows. The barrier seemed even now to be impassable; and it had yet seven minutes to gather strength. If it should prove too great to be broken, the fleet might be locked in for a week; and with every hour of delay the size of the prospective catch would dwindle. The captains of the nearer vessels were madly shouting to the old skipper of the *Dictator* to strike before it was too late; but he gave them no heed whatever. He stood with his watch in his hand, waiting for the moment of midnight.

"We're caught!" cried the mate.

The captain said nothing. He was watching the jam—hoping that it would break of its own weight.

"Three minutes, sir," said the mate.

The captain glanced at the watch in his hand. "Two an' a half," he muttered, a moment later.

A pause.

"Midnight, sir!" cried the mate.

"Go ahead!"

Archie heard the tinkle of the bell in the engineer's room below: then the answering signal on the bridge. The crew raised a cheer; the

mate pulled the whistle rope; there was a muffled hurrah from the shore.

"Half speed! Port a little!"

The steamer gathered headway. She was now making for the harbour entrance on a straight course.

"Full speed!"

Then the *Dictator* charged the barrier.

CHAPTER XXVIII

In Which Archie Armstrong falls in with Bill o' Burnt Bay and Billy Topsail of Ruddy Cove and Makes a Speech

THERE is no telling what would have happened had the *Dictator* struck the jam of ice in the narrows of Long Tom Harbour. Captain Hand was not the man to lose half a voyage because there was a risk to be taken; had he been used to counting the risk, he would not have been in command of the finest ship in Armstrong and Son's fine fleet. Rather than be locked in the harbour, he had launched his vessel at the barrier, quietly confident that she would acquit herself well. But, as he had foreseen, the jam broke of its own weight before the steamer struck. Of a sudden, it cracked, and gave way; the key blocks had broken. It then remained only to breast the pack, which was not at all an impossible undertaking for the stout *Dictator*.

With her rivals following close, she struck the floe, broke a way through, and pushed on, with a great noise, but slowly, surely; and she was

soon in the open sea. The course was then shaped northeast, for it appeared that open water lay in that direction. The floe retarded the ship's progress, but could not stop it; the ice pans crashed against her prow and scraped her sides, but she was staunch enough to withstand every shock; and so, gaining on the rest of the fleet, she crept out to sea, in the teeth of the rising gale.

At two o'clock in the morning, Archie Armstrong was still on the bridge with the captain and mate. The lights of the fleet were lost in the night behind. The *Dictator* had laboured through the first field of ice into open water. The sea was dotted with great, white "pans," widely scattered; and, as the captain had feared, there were signs of bergs in the darkness roundabout. The waves were rising, spume crested, on every hand; at intervals, they broke over the bows, port and starboard, with frightful violence. Gusts of wind whirled the spray to the bridge, where it soon sheathed men and superstructure in ice.

"Send a lookout aloft, Mr. Ackell," said the captain, after he had long and anxiously peered straight ahead.

The thud of ice, as the seas hurled it against

the ship's prows, the hiss and crash of the waves, the screaming of the gale, drowned the captain's order.

"Pass the word for Bill o' Burnt Bay!" he roared.

A short, brawny man, of middle age, who had not missed a voyage to the ice in twenty years, soon appeared in response to the call, which had gone from mouth to mouth through the ship. Archie was inclined to smile when he observed Bill's unkempt, sandy moustache, which was curiously given an upward twist at one side, and a downward twist at the other. Nevertheless, he was strongly attracted to him; for he looked like a man who could be trusted to the limit of his courage and strength.

"Take a glass t' the nest, b'y, an' look sharp for bergs," the captain ordered. "Don't stay up there. Come back an' report t' me here."

The man went off with a brisk, "Ay, ay, sir!" It was his duty to clamber to the crow's-nest—a cask lashed to the topmast just below the mast-head—and to sweep the sea for signs of bergs.

"'Tis more than I bargained for, Mr. Ackell," the captain went on, to the mate, in an anxious undertone, which, however, Archie managed to

catch ; and it may be added that the lad's heart jumped into his throat, and had a hard time getting back into place again.

" Dirty weather, sir ! " the mate agreed. " I'm thinkin' we're close to some heavy ice."

" Well," said the captain, after a pause, " keep her head as she points now. I'll have a look 'tween decks."

Archie was tempted to ask the captain " if there was any danger." The foolish question was fairly on the tip of his tongue ; but his better sense came to his rescue in time. Danger ? Of course, there was ! There was always danger. He had surely not come on a sealing voyage expecting none ! But catastrophe was not yet inevitable. At any rate, it was the captain's duty to sail the ship. He was responsible to the owners, and to the families of the crew ; the part of the passenger was but bravely to meet the fortune that came. So, completely regaining his courage, Archie followed the captain below.

'Tween decks the stout hearts were rollicking still. The working crew had duty to do, every man of them ; but the two hundred hunters, who had been taken along to wield gaff and club, were sprawled in every place, singing, laughing,

yarning, scuffling, for all the world like a pack of boys : making light of discomfort, and thinking not at all of danger, for the elation of departure still possessed them. Had any misgiving still remained with Archie, the sight of this jolly, careless crowd of hunters would have quieted it. *They* were not alarmed. Then, why should he be? Doubtless, it was responsibility that made the captain anxious.

In the improvised cabin aft, Ebenezer Bowsprit, of Exploits, was roaring the "Luck o' the Northern Light," a famous old sealing song, which, no doubt, his grandfather had sung to shipmates upon similar occasions long ago. Rough, frank faces, broadly smiling, were turned to him ; and when it came time for the chorus, willing voices and mighty lungs swelled it to a volume that put the very gale to shame. The ship was pitching violently—with a nauseating roll occasionally thrown in—and the cabin was crowded and hot and filled with clouds of tobacco smoke ; but neither pitch, nor roll, nor heat, nor smoke, could interfere with the jollity of the occasion.

"All right here," the captain growled, grinning in his great beard.

"Speech, Sir Archie!" shouted one of the men.

Before Archie could escape—and amid great laughter and uproar and louder calls for a speech —he was caught by the arm, jerked off his feet, and hoisted on the table, where he bumped his head, and, by an especially violent roll of the vessel, was almost thrown headlong into the arms of the grinning crowd around him.

"Speech, speech!" they roared.

Archie would have declined with some heat had he not caught sight of the face of Tim Tuttle—a tawny, lean, long man, apparently as strong as a wire rope. There was a steely twinkle in his eye, and a sneering, utterly contemptuous smile upon his thin lips. Archie did not know that this was Tuttle's habitual expression. He felt that the man expected a rather amusing failure on the part of Sir Archibald Armstrong's son; and that stimulated him to take the situation seriously. Unconsciously calling his good breeding to his aid, he pulled off his cap, smoothed his hair, touched his cravat, and —

"Ahem!" he began; as he had heard the governor of the colony do a dozen times, and as now, to his surprise, he found most inspiring.

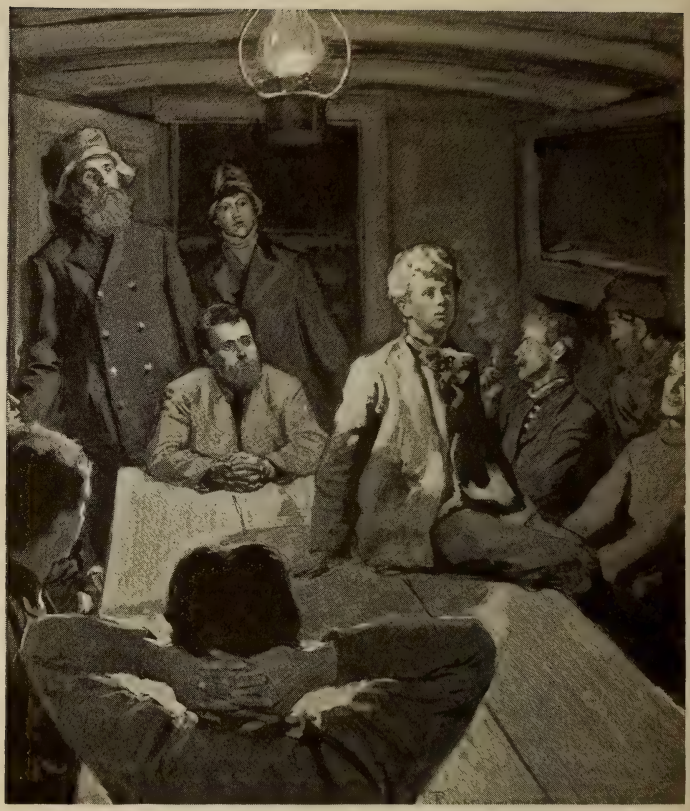
"Hear, hear!" burst rapturously from old Ebenezer Bowsprit.

Ebenezer was in a condition of high delight and expectation. Admiration shone in his eyes, surprise was depicted by his wide opened mouth, bewonderment by his strained attention. The sight of his face was too much for Archie.

"Oh, what Tommy-rot!" he laughed. "Here, let me go! I can't (hold me up, or I'll fall) make a speech. ("Hear, hear!" from the awe-stricken Ebenezer.) All I got to say is that I'm (*please* get a better hold on my legs, or I'll be pitched off) mighty glad to be here. I'm having the best time of my life, and I expect to have a better one when we strike the seals. (Loud and prolonged cheering.) I hope ——"

But, in the excitement following his last remark, the speaker's support was withdrawn, and a pitch of the ship threw him off the table. He was caught, set on his feet, and clapped on the back. Then he managed to escape with the captain, followed by loud cries of "More! More!" to which he felt justified in paying no attention.

"You're your father's son," laughed the captain, as they made their way up the deck.



HE WAS NEAR THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH VERSE.

"Sure, your father never in his life let slip a chance t' make a speech."

In the forecastle they had a lad on the table under the lantern—a tow-headed, blue-eyed, muscular boy, of Archie's age, or less. He had on goatskin boots, a jacket of homespun, and a flaring red scarf. The men were quiet; for the boy was piping, in a clear, quavering treble, the "Song o' the Anchor an' Chain," a Ruddy Cove saga, which goes to the air of a plaintive West Country ballad of the seventeenth century, with the refrain,

"Sure, the chain 'e parted,
An' the schooner drove ashoare,
An' the wives o' the 'ands
Never saw un any moare.
No moare!
Never saw un any mo-o-o-are!"

He was near the end of the sixteenth verse, and the men were drawing breath for the chorus, when the captain appeared in the door, wrath in his eyes.

"What's this?" roared he.

There was no answer. The lad turned to face the captain, in part deferentially, in part humorously, altogether fearlessly.

CHAPTER XXIX

Billy Topsail is Shipped Upon Conditions, and the Dictator, in a Rising Gale, is Caught in a Field of Drift Ice, with a Growler to Leeward

"WHERE'D you come aboard, b'y?" Captain Hand demanded.

"Long Tom, sir."

"Who shipped you?"

"I stowed away in a bunker, sir."

"You're from Ruddy Cove?" said the captain.

"Yes, sir. Me name's Billy, an' me father's a Labrador fisherman. Sure, I've sailed t' the French Shore, sir, an' I'm a handy lad t' work, sir."

"Billy what?"

"Topsail, sir."

The captain raised his eyebrows; then dropped them, and stared at the boy. He had been before the mast with old Tom Topsail on a South American barque in years long gone.

"You'll work hard, b'y," said he, severely, for he had been bothered with stowaways for thirty years, "an' I'll ship you regular, if you do your

duty. If you don't," and here the captain frowned tremendously, "I'll have you thrashed at the post at Long Tom, an' you'll have no share with the crew in the cargo."

"Ay, sir," said Billy, gladly. "Sure, I'll stand by it, sir."

When the captain turned his back, out came the belated chorus, with young Billy Topsail leading:

"Sure, the chain 'e parted,
An' the schooner drove ashoare,
An' the wives o' the 'ands
Never saw un any moare.
No moare!
Never saw un any mo-o-o-are!"

"If he's like his dad," the captain chuckled to Archie, as they mounted to the deck, "his name will be on the ship's books before the v'y'ge is over, sure enough."

It appeared from the bridge that the gale was venting the utmost of its force. The wind had veered a point or two to the north, and was driving out of the darkness a vast field of broken ice. This, close packed and grinding, was bearing down swiftly. It threatened to block the ship's

course—if not to surround her, take hold of her, and sweep her away. In the northeast, dead over the bows, there loomed a great white mass, a berg, grandly towering, with its peaks hidden in black, scudding clouds. Beyond, and on either side, patches of white, vanishing and reappearing, disclosed the whereabouts of other bergs.

"I was thinkin' about slowin' down," said the mate, when the captain had scanned the prospect ahead.

With that, some part of Archie's alarm returned. It continued with him, while the captain moved the lever of the signal box until the indicator marked half speed, while the ship lost way, and the engines throbbed, as though alive and breathing hard.

"Report, sir!"

This was Bill o' Burnt Bay, down from the crow's-nest, with his beard frozen to his jacket and icicles hanging from his shaggy eyebrows.

"Well?"

"They's a big field o' ice bearin' down with the wind. 'Tis heavy, an' comin' fast, an' 'tis stretchin' as far as I can see. They's five good-sized bergs ahead, sir, with pan ice all about them. An' ——"

"Growlers?" sharply.

"An' they's a big growler off the port bow. 'Twill soon be dead t' leeward, if we keeps this course."

Bill o' Burnt Bay lumbered down the ladder and made for the forecastle to thaw out. Meantime, the captain devoted himself to giving the growler a wide berth; for a growler is a berg which trembles on the verge of toppling over, and he had no wish to be caught between it and the advancing floe. He had once lost a schooner that way; the adventure was one of his most vivid recollections.

"We'll have t' get out o' this, Mr. Ackell," he said, "or we may get badly nipped. We'll tie up t' the first steady berg we come to. Here, b'y," sharply, to Archie, "you'll not go t' bed for a while. Keep near me—but keep out o' the way."

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Turn out all hands!"

The cry of "All hands on deck!" was passed fore and aft. It ran through the ship like an alarm. The men trooped from below, wondering what had occasioned it. Once on deck, a swift glance into the driving night apprised these

old sealers of the situation. They placed the ice hooks and tackle in handy places; for the work in hand was plain enough.

The ship was swinging wide of the growler, against which the wind beat with mighty force. A vast surface was exposed to the gale; and upon every square foot a varying pressure was exerted. As the vessel drew nearer, Archie could see the iceberg yield and sway. It was evident that its submerged parts had been melted and worn until the equilibrium of the whole was nearly overset. A sudden, furious gust might turn the scale; and in that event a near-by vessel would surely be overwhelmed.

Captain Hand kept a watchful eye on the ice pack, which had now come within a hundred fathoms, and was hurrying upon the advancing ship. The vessel was between the floe and the growler: a situation not to be escaped, as the captain had foreseen. The danger was clear: if the rush of the floe should be too great for the steamer to withstand, she would be swept, broadside on, against the berg, which, being of greater weight and depth, moved sluggishly. Stout as she was, she could not survive the collision.

The captain turned her bow to the pack; then

he signalled full speed ahead. There was a moment of waiting.

"Grab the rail, b'y," said the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The floe divided before the ship; the shock was hardly perceptible. For a moment, where, at the edge, the ice was loose, she maintained her speed. But the floe thickened. The fragments were packed tight. It was as though the face of the sea were covered with a solid sheet of ice, lying ahead as far as sight carried into the night. The ship laboured. Her speed diminished, gradually, but perceptibly—vividly so! Her progress was soon at the rate of half speed. In a moment it was even slower than that. Would it stop altogether?

Archie was on the port side of the bridge. The captain walked over to him and slapped him heartily on the back.

"Well, b'y," he cried, "how do you like the sealin' v'y'ge?"

That was a clever thought of the captain! Here was a man in desperate case who could await the issue in light patience. The boy took heart at the thought of it; and he needed that encouragement.

"I knew what it was when I started," he replied, with a gulp.

"Will she make it, think you?"

Another clever ruse of this great heart! He wanted the boy to have a part in the action. Archie felt the blood stirring in his veins once again.

"She's pretty near steady, sir, I think," he replied, after a pause.

The two leaned over the rail and looked intently at the ice sweeping past.

"Are we losing, sir?" asked the boy.

"I think we're holdin' our own," said the captain, elatedly.

The boy turned to the great growler, now vague of outline in the dark. The ice floe had swept over the limit of vision. He wondered if it had struck the base of the berg. Then all at once the heap of cloudy white swayed forth and back before his eyes. For a moment it was like a gigantic curtain waving in the wind. It vanished of a sudden. A mountain of broken water shot up in its place—as high as its topmost pinnacle had been; and, following close upon its fall, another berg, with a worn outline, reared itself, dripping streams of water.

Thus far there had been no sound; but the sound beat its way against the wind, at last, and it was a thunderous noise—"like the growlin' of a million dogs," the captain said afterwards. The growler had capsized.

"Look!" the boy cried, overcome.

"Turned turtle, ain't she?" remarked the skipper, calmly.

"The pack might have carried us near it!"

"Oh," said the captain, lightly, "but it didn't. She's a good ship, the *Dictator*. What's more," he added, "she's makin' her way right through the pack."

Another berg had taken form over the port quarter. The captain shaped a course for it, eyeing it carefully as he drew near. It was low—not higher than the ship's spars—and broad, with the impression of stability strong upon it.

"See that berg, b'y?" said the captain. "Well," decisively, "we'll lie in the lee o' that in half an hour. You see, b'y," he went on, "the wind makes small bother for a solid berg. It whips the pan ice along, easy enough, but the bergs float their own way, quiet as you please. In the lee of every big fellow like that, there's

open water. We'll lie there, tied up, till mornin'."

In half an hour, the ship broke from the ice into the lee of the berg. The floe raced past under the force of the gale, which left the lee air and water untouched by its violence. Skillful seamanship brought the vessel broadside to the ice. A wild commotion ensued: orders roared from the bridge, signal bells, the shouts of the line men, the hiss of steam, and the churning of the screw. Archie saw young Billy Topsail scramble to the ice like a cat, with the first line in his hand: then Bill o' Burnt Bay and half a dozen others, with axes and hooks.

In twenty minutes the engines were at rest, the ship was lying like a log in a mill pond, the watch paced the deck in solitude, and Archibald Armstrong was asleep in his berth in the captain's cabin—dreaming that the mate was wrong and the captain right: that the gale had abated in the night, and the morning had broken sunny.

CHAPTER XXX

In Which Archie Armstrong and Billy Topsail Have an Exciting Encounter with a Big Dog Hood, and, at the Sound of Alarm, Leave the Issue in Doubt, While the Ice Goes Abroad and the Enemy Goes Swimming

HAIR seals, which come out of the north with the ice in the early spring, and drift in great herds past the rugged Newfoundland coast, returning in April, have no close, soft fur next the skin, such as the South Sea and Alaskan seals have. Hence, they are valued only for their blubber, which is ground and steamed into oil, and for their skin, which is turned into leather. They are of two kinds, the harp which is doubtless indigenous to the great inland sea and the waters above, and the hood, which inhabits the harsher regions of the farther north and east. The harp is timid, gentle, gregarious, and takes in packs to the flat, newly frozen, landward pans; the hood is fierce, quarrelsome and solitary, grimly riding the rough glacier ice at the edge of the open sea.

Thus the *Dictator* lay through the night with hood ice all about the sheltering berg.

"Hi, b'y! Get yarry (wide awake)!" cried the captain, in the morning.

Archie Armstrong was "yarry" on the instant, and he rolled out of his berth in hot haste, not at all sure that it was not time to leave a sinking ship in the boats. The hairy face of the old sealer, a broad, kindly grin upon it, peered at him from the door.

"Morning, skipper!"

"Mornin' t' you, sir. An' a fine mornin' 'tis," said the captain. "Sure a finer I never saw."

"What's become of the gale?"

"The gale's miles t' the sou'east—an' out o' sight o' these latitudes. We're packed in the lee o' the berg, an' fast till the wind changes. There's a family o' hoods, quarter mile t' starboard. Up, now, b'y! an' you'll go after them with a crew after breakfast."

When Archie reached the deck, the air was limpid, frosty and still. There was a blue sky overhead, stretching from horizon to horizon. A waste of ice lay all about—rough, close-packed, glistening in the sun. With the falling away of the wind the floe had lost its headway, and had

crept softly in upon the open water. The ship was held in the grip of the pack, and must perforce remain for a time in the shadow of the berg, where shelter from the gale of the night had been sought. Save for the watch of that hour, the men were below, at breakfast. The "great white silence" possessed the sea. For the boy, this silence, vast and heavy, and the immeasurable area of broken ice, with its pent-up, treacherous might, was as awe-impelling as the gale and the night.

"What d'ye think, Mr. Ackell?" said the captain to the mate, when the two came up.

Ackell looked to the northeast. "We'll have wind by noon," he replied.

"'Tis what I think," the captain agreed. "Archie, b'y, you'll have a couple of hours, afore the ice goes abroad. Bowsprit 'll take the crew, an' you'll do what he tells you."

Ebenezer Bowsprit, with half a dozen cronies of his own choosing, led the way over the side, in high good humour. In the group on the deck stood Billy Topsail. He eyed Archie with frank envy as the lad prepared to descend to the ice; for to participate in the first hunt, generally regarded as pure sport, was a thing greatly to be

desired. He was perceived by Archie, who was at once taken with a wish for company of his own age.

"Captain," the boy whispered, "let the other kid come along, won't you?"

"Topsail," the captain ordered, "get a gaff, an' cut along with the rest."

In five minutes, the boys had broken the ice of diffidence, and were chatting like sociable magpies, as they crawled, jumped, climbed, over the uneven pack. They were Newfoundlanders both: the same in strength, feeling, spirit, and, indeed, experience. The one was of the remote out-ports, where children are reared to toil and peril, which, with hunger, is their heritage, and must ever be; the other was of the city, son of the well-to-do, who, following sport for sport's sake, had made the same ventures and become used to the same toil and peril.

"'Tis barb'rous hard walkin'," said Billy.

"Sure," replied the other. "And they're getting away ahead of us."

Ebenezer Bowsprit and his fellows, with the lust of the chase strong upon them, were making great strides towards three black objects some hundred yards away. It was a race; for it

is a tradition that he who strikes the first blow of the voyage will have "luck" the season through. The boys were hopelessly behind, and they stopped to look about them. It was then that Billy Topsail spied a patch of open water, to the left, half hidden by the surrounding ice. It was a triangular hole in the floe, formed by three heavy blocks, which had withstood the pressure of the pack.

"Look!" he cried.

A head, small and alert, raised upon a thick, supple neck, appeared. A moment later, a second head popped out of the water. They were hoods. The young one, the pup, must lie near. The boys stood stock still until the seals had clambered to the pack. Then they advanced swiftly. Billy Topsail was armed with a gaff, which is a pole shod with iron at one end and having a hook at the other; and Archie was provided with a sealing club. They came upon the dog hood before he could escape to the water. Perceiving this, and only on this account, he turned, snarling, to give fight.

"I'll take him!" cried Billy.

The hood was as big as an ox—a massive, flabby, vicious beast. He was furiously aroused,

and he would now fight to the death, with no thought of retreat. He raised himself on his flippers and reared his head to the length of his long neck, as the boy, stepping cautiously, gaff poised, drew near.

"Get behind him," Billy shouted to Archie.

Billy advanced fearlessly, steadily, never for a moment taking his eyes from the hood's head. Upon that head, from the nose to the back of the neck, the tough, bladder-like "hood" was now inflated. It was a perfect protection; the boy might strike blow after blow without effect. The stroke must be thrust at the throat; and it must be a stroke swiftly, cunningly, strongly delivered. A furious hood, excited past fear, is a match for three men. The odds were against the lad. He had been carried away by his own daring.

But Billy made the thrust, and the seal received the point of the gaff on his hood, as upon a shield: then advanced on his flippers, by jerky jumps, snapping viciously. Archie cried out. But Billy had skipped out of harm's way, and had faced about, laughing. He returned to the attack, undismayed, though the seal reared to meet him, with bared teeth.



THEN HE ADVANCED UPON THE BOY.

"Strike!" screamed Archie.

Teeth and flippers were to be feared, and Billy had drawn nearly within reach of both. He paused, waiting his opportunity. Archie could not contain his excitement.

"Strike!" he cried again.

Billy struck; but the blow had no force, for he slipped, overreached, lost his footing, and fell sprawling, almost within reach of his adversary's teeth. The seal snarled and drew back, startled. Then he advanced upon the boy, who had had no time to recover, much less to scramble out of his desperate situation.

It was for Archie to act. He leaped forward from his position behind the seal, struck the animal with full force upon the tail, and darted out of reach. The hood snorted, and turned in a rage to face his new assailant. Billy leaped to his feet, gaff in hand, and faced about, panting, but ready. He was preparing to attack again, when —

"What's that?" Archie cried in alarm.

It was the boom of the ship's gun, followed by an ominous, hollow crackling, which ran into the distance like a long peal of thunder. The floe seemed to be turning.

"'Tis goin' abroad!" Billy shouted. "Quick, b'y! T' the ship!"

The boys had been out of sight of the ship, hidden by a shoulder of the berg. They had not seen the flag of recall, which had been flying for ten minutes. Again they heard the report of the gun; and they saw Ebenezer Bowsprit and his men making shipwards with all speed. Billy was fully aware of the danger. With another warning cry to Archie, he started off on a run, turning from time to time to make sure that his companion was following.

The ice was nauseatingly unstable, grinding and shifting; but no open water had as yet appeared, though, at any moment, a lane might open up and cut off the retreat. The floe was feeling the force of a wind in the north, and was stirring itself from edge to edge. It would soon be shaken into its separate parts. But with Billy Topsail leading, the boys ran steadily over the heaving foothold, and in good time came to the ship, which the rest of the hunting party had already boarded.

Billy Topsail was laughing.

"I don't feel that way," said Archie, "we were in a good deal of danger."

Billy laughed louder.

"Well, we *were*, weren't we?" Archie demanded.

"Maybe," said Billy; "but you'll get used t' *that!*"

They were not a moment too soon, however; for the pack very quickly fell apart—thus opening a way for the escape of the *Dictator*. And meantime, the gallant old dog hood had followed the retreating figures with his eyes: after which, well satisfied with himself, he slipped into the water and went fishing.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Dictator Charges an Ice Pan and Loses a Main Topmast

"CAST loose!" was the order from the bridge.

The men scrambled to the berg and released the lines and ice-hooks. The pack was still loosening under the rising breeze. To the east, separating the sky from the ice, lay a long black streak—the water of the open sea; a clear way to the broad, white fields. Once free of the floe, the ship would speed northward to the Yellow Islands and Cape William coasts. In a day and a night, the weather continuing propitious, it would be, "Ho! for the ice. Ho! for the seals."

A lane of water opened up. "Go ahead," was the signal from the master on the bridge, and the ship moved forward, with her nose turned to the sea.

"Ha, Mr. Ackell!" exclaimed the captain, rubbing his horny hands. "Looks t' be a fine time, man. We'll make the Yellow Islands at dawn t'-morrow, if all goes well."

When the *Dictator* had followed the lane to within one hundred yards of free water, the advance was blocked by a great pan of ice, tight jammed in the pack on either side. So fast and vagrantly was the floe shifting its formation that what had been a clear path was now crossed by a mighty barrier. Here was no slob ice to be forged through at full steam, but a solid mass, like a bar of iron, lying across the path.

The ship was taken to the edge of the obstruction, and the captain and mate went forward to the bow to gauge the strength of it. When they came back to the bridge, the former had his teeth set.

"It's stiff work for the old ship," said the mate.

The captain growled as he pulled the signal lever for full speed astern.

"Take half a day to cut a way through," he said. "We'll ram it. Here, b'y," to Archie, "get off the bridge. You're in the way."

Archie joined Billy Topsail on the forward deck. Neither had yet experienced a charge on a pan of ice; but both had listened, open eyed, to the sealing tales of daring that had brought disaster.

"I feel queer," Archie remarked.

"Cap'n Hand," said Billy, as though trying to revive his faith in the old skipper, "he's a clever one. 'Tis all right."

"Make fast below," the captain shouted over the bridge rail.

The word was passed in a lively fashion. Tackle, boats, and all things loose, were lashed in their places, as if for a great gale.

"Stop!" was the next signal. Then: "Full speed ahead!"

The blow had been launched! A moment later, the *Dictator* was ploughing forward, charging the pan, which she must strike like a battering ram, and shiver to pieces. She was of solid oak, this good ship, and builded for such attacks; steel plates would buckle and spring under such shocks as she had many times triumphantly sustained. The men were silent while they awaited the event. There was not a sound save the hiss of the water at the ship's prows, and the *chug-chug* of the engines.

Archie caught his breath. His eyes were fixed on the fast vanishing space of water. The thrill of the adventure was manifest in Billy Topsail's sharp, quick breathing, and in his blue eyes,

which were as though about to pop out of their sockets.

"Stop!"

The engines abruptly ceased their labour. Only a fathom or two of water lay ahead. The ship was about to strike. There was a long drawn instant of suspense. Then came the blow!

It was a fearful shock. The vessel quivered, crushed her way on for a space, and stopped dead, quivering still. A groan ran over her, from stem to stern, as though she had been racked in every part. The main topmast snapped and fell forward on the rigging with a crash.

A volley of cracks sounded from the ice, like the discharge of a thousand rifles, slowly subsiding. Dead silence fell and continued for a moment. Then the screw churned the water, and the ship backed off, sound, but beaten; for the pan of ice lay, unbroken and unchanged, in its place, with but a jagged bruise, where the blow had been struck.

"Aloft, there, some o' you, an' cut away that spar!" the captain shouted. "Bill, get below, an' see if she's tight. Here, you, Dickson, call the watch t' make sail. Mr. Girth," to the

second mate, "take a crew t' the ice. Blast that pan in three places. Lively, now, every man o' you!"

Roaring subordinates, answering "Ay, ay, sirs!" rattling blocks and chains, the fall of hurried feet, cries of warning and encouragement, the engine's gasps: these sounds confounded the confusion, and continued it, while the ship, snorting like a frightened horse, was backed to her first position.

"He'll try it again," Archie gleefully observed to Billy.

The captain was pacing the bridge. Try it again? He was in a fever of impatience to be at it! It was as though the pan of ice were a foe needing only another and a heavier blow to be beaten down.

"Sure," said Billy, after a glance to the bridge, "he'll hit that pan till he smashes it, if it takes till Tibb's Eve!"

"Tibb's Eve?"

"Sure, b'y. Does you not know what that is? 'Tis till the end o' the world."

The ship was again to be launched against the pan. The second mate took the blasting crew to the ice in the quarter boat; and he lost no time

about it, as the captain made sure. Up aloft went other hands to cut away the broken spar and loose the canvas. Work was carried on under the spur of the captain's harshened voice; for the captain was in a passion to prove the quality of his ship.

The ice picks were plied as fast as arms could swing them. Soon the mines were laid and fired. And when the dust of ice had fallen, and the noise of the explosion had gone rumbling into the distance, three gaping holes marked the pan at regular intervals from edge to edge.

"She's all tight below, sir," was the carpenter's report.

"Now, Mr. Ackell," said the captain, grimly, "in ten minutes we'll be free o' the ice, or ——"

They made all sail. After a quiet word or two of command, forth the ship shot, heeling to the breeze, wind now allied with steam. Her course was laid straight for the jagged bruise in the pan. There was no stopping her now. The ice was cracked and shivered into a thousand pieces. The ship forged on, grinding the cakes to fragments, heaping them up, riding them down. She quivered when she struck, and strained and creaked as she crushed her way forward, but she

crept on, invincible, adding inch to inch, foot to foot, until she swept out into the unclogged water.

Then she shook the ice from her screw, and ran grandly into the swelling sea.

"Hurrah!" the stout hearts roared.

"Hem—hem! Mr. Ackell," said the captain, with some emotion, "'tis a great ship!"

It occurred to Archie that night, while he sat munching hard biscuit with the captain before turning in, to ask a few questions about Tim Tuttle. What was the matter with the man? Why did he go about with a sneer or a frown forever on his face? Why was he not like all the rest of the crew? Why did the crew seem to expect him to "do" something? Why did the captain flush and bristle when Tuttle came near?

"Oh," the captain replied, with a laugh, "Tuttle had a fallin' out with me when we was young. I think," he added, gravely, "that he wronged me. But that's neither here nor there. I forgave him. The point is—an' I've often run across the same thing in my life—that he won't forgive *me* for forgivin' *him*. That's odd, isn't it? But it's true. An' he's aboard here t' make trouble;

an' the men know that that's just what he came for."

"But what did you ship him for, captain, if you knew that?"

The captain paused. "Well," he said, "because I'm only a man, I s'pose. I couldn't help knockin' the chip off his shoulder."

"Do you think he *can* make trouble?"

"I'd like t' see him try!" the captain burst out, wrathfully.

Tuttle's opportunity occurred the next day.

CHAPTER XXXII

In Which Seals are Sighted and Archie Armstrong has a Narrow Chance in the Crow's-Nest.

AT peep o' dawn the *Dictator* made the Groais Island sealing grounds. The day broke late and dull. The sky was a dead gray, hanging heavily over a dark, fretful sea; and there was a threat of wind and snow in the air.

"Ice, sir!" said the mate, poking his head into the captain's cabin, his ceremony lost in his elation.

"Take her 'longside," cried the captain, jumping out of his berth. "What's it like?"

"Looks like a big field o' seal ice, sir."

"Hear that, b'y?" the captain shouted to Archie, who was sitting up in his berth, still rubbing his eyes. "A field o' ice! There'll be a hunt t'-day. Mr. Ackell, tell the cook t' send the breakfast up here. What's the weather?"

"Promisin' thick, sir."

When the captain and the boy went on deck,

the ice was in plain sight—many vast fields, rising over the horizon continually, so that there seemed to be no end to it. From the crow's-nest it had been reported to the mate, who reported to the captain, that the spars of a three-masted ship were visible, and that the vessel was apparently lying near the ice. That was considered bad news—and worse news yet, when it was reported from the crow's-nest that she was flying the house-flag of Alexander Bryan & Company, the only considerable rival of the firm of Armstrong and Son.

"Oh, well," said the captain, making the best of it in a generous way, "there'll be 25,000 seals in that pack, an' out o' that we ought t' bag enough t' pay both of us for the day's work."

Archie caught sight of Billy Topsail, who was standing on the forward deck, gazing wistfully at him; so he went forward, and the two found much to say to each other, while the ship made for the ice under full steam. They fought the fight with the dog hood over again; and when Billy had acknowledged a debt to Archie's quick thought, and Archie had repudiated it with some heat, they agreed that the old seal had been a mighty fellow, and a game one, deserving his es-

cape from continued attack. Then they abandoned the subject.

"Pretty hard work on the ice," Archie observed, sagely.

"Sure!" Billy exclaimed; for that had been clear to him all his life. "'Tis fearful dangerous, too. When my father was young, he was to the ice in a schooner, an' they got caught with the fleet in raftin' ice offshore, up Englee way. He saw six schooners nipped; an' they were all crushed like an egg, an' went down when the ice went abroad. His was the only one o' all the fleet that stood the crush."

"Think you'll share with the crew, Billy?"

"I want to," Billy said with a laugh. Then, soberly: "I want to, for I want t' get a skiff for lobster-fishin' in New Bay. They's lots o' lobsters there, an' they's no one trappin' down that way. 'Tis a great chance," with a sigh.

The captain beckoned Archie to the upper deck. "Tell me, now," he said, when the boy reached his side, "can you go aloft?"

"Yes," Archie answered, laughing scornfully. "I'm no landsman!"

[1] A floe of pans so forcibly driven by the wind as to be crowded into layers.

"True word, if you're son of your father! Then get up with the bar'l man, an' take a trick at swatchin'. 'Tis cold work, but great sport."

"Swatching" is merely the convenient form for "seal watching." It appeared to Archie that to swatch with the barrel man must be a highly diverting occupation. He was not slow to mount the rope ladder to the masthead, and slip into the cask with the swatcher, who chanced to be Bill o' Burnt Bay and vociferously made him welcome.

"See anything yet?" asked the boy.

"I'll show you them swiles (seals) in a minute or two," Bill replied confidently.

Archie was closely muffled in wool and fur; but the wind, which was bitter and blowing hard, searched out the unprotected places, and in five minutes he was crouching in the cask for shelter, only too glad to find an excuse in the swatcher's advice.

"H-h-h-how l-l-long you been h-h-here?" he chattered.

"Sure, b'y," said Bill, with no suspicion of a shiver in his voice, "'tis goin' on two hours, now."

"P-p-pretty cold, i-i-isn't it?"

Bill o' Burnt Bay did not reply. His eye was

glued to the telescope, which fairly shook in his hands. Then he leaned over the rim of the cask, altogether disregarding its instability.

"Seals ho!" he roared.

A cheer went up. Looking down, Archie saw the men swarming to the deck.

"Take a look at them harps, b'y," said Bill, excitedly. "No! Starboard the glass. There! See them?"

Archie made out a myriad of moving specks—black dots, small and great, shifting about over a broad white surface. They were like many insects. He saw Alexander Bryan & Company's vessel, too; and it appeared to him that the men were just landing on the ice to attack the pack.

"That's the *Lucky Star*," Bill explained. "She's a smaller ship than we, an' she've got about a hundred men, I s'pose. Never fear, lad, we'll be up in time t' get our share o' the swiles."

"I-I-I-I g-g-guess I'll g-g-go down, now," said Archie.

Half an hour of exposure in the crow's-nest had chilled the lad to numbness. His blood was running sluggishly; he was shivering; his legs were stiff, and his hands were cold and uncertain in

their grip. He climbed out of the cask, and cleverly enough made good his footing on the platform of the nest. It was when he essayed the descent that he erred and faltered.

He had a full, two-handed grip on the topmast backstays, and was secure in searching with his foot for the rope ladder lashed thereto. But when his foot struck, he released his left hand from the stays, without pausing to make sure that his foot was firm-fixed on the rung. His foot missed the rung altogether, and found no place to rest. In a flash, he had rolled over, and hung suspended by one hand, which, numb though it was, had unexpectedly to bear the weight of his whole body.

"Be careful goin' down, b'y," he heard Bill o' Burnt Bay say.

The voice seemed to come out of a great distance. Archie knew, in a dim way, that the attention of the man was fixed elsewhere—doubtless on the herd of harps. Then he fell into a stupefaction of terror. It seemed to him, in his panic, that Bill would never discover his situation; that he must hang there, with his grip loosening, instant by instant—until he fell.

He was speechless, incapable of action, when,

by chance, Bill o' Burnt Bay looked down. The sealer quietly reached over the cask and caught him by the collar ; then lifted him to the platform, and there held him fast. Each looked silently, tensely, into the other's eyes.

"'Tis a cold day," said Bill, dryly.

Archie gasped.

"Tough on tender hands, b'y," said Bill.

"Yes," gasped the lad, in a hoarse whisper.

There was a long silence, through which the swatcher looked Archie in the eye, holding him tight all the while.

"'Tis not wise t' be in a hurry, sometimes," he observed, at last.

The boy waited until he could view the necessity of descent with composure. Then, with extreme caution, he made his way to the deck, and went to the cabin, where he warmed himself over the stove. Apparently, the incident had passed unnoticed from the deck. He said nothing about it to the captain, nor to any one else ; nor did Bill o' Burnt Bay, who had an adequate conception of the sensitiveness of lads in respect to such narrow chances.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Ice Runs Red, and, in Storm and Dusk, Tim Tuttle Brews a Pot o' Trouble for Captain Hand, While Billy Topsail Observes the Operation

MEANTIME the ship drew near the ice. When Archie came again on deck, his nerves quite composed, she was being driven in and out through the fields to a point as near to the first seal pack as she could be taken —a mile distant, at the least. During this tedious search for a landing place, the crew's eager excitement passed the bounds of discipline. The men could see the crew from Alexander Bryan & Company's *Lucky Star* at work; and that excited them the more: they were mad to reach the ice before their rivals could molest the pack for which they were bound.

When, at last, the engines were stopped, a party of sixty was formed in a haphazard fashion; the boats were lowered in haste, and the men leaped and tumbled into them, crowding them down to the gunwales. In one of the boats were Archie and Billy, the former in the care of Bill o'

Burnt Bay, to whom the "nursing" was not altogether agreeable, under the circumstances; the latter in charge of himself, a lenient guardian, but a wise one.

"Don't get into trouble with the crew o' the *Lucky Star*," had been the captain's last command.

The men landed, hurrahing, and at once organized into half a dozen separate expeditions. The direction to be taken by each was determined by the leaders, and they set off at a dog trot upon their diverging paths over the ice to the widely distributed seal pack. Meantime, the boats were taken back to the ship and hoisted in; and the ship steamed off to land another party on another field, thence to land the last party near a third pack.

The boys trotted in Bill's wake. Two pennant bearers, carrying flags to mark the heaps of "fat," as they should be formed, led the file. One of these men—it happened by chance, to all appearances—was the captain's enemy, Tim Tuttle. Their work was particularly important on that day, with the crew of the *Lucky Star* working so near at hand; for the flags were to mark the ownership of the mounds of "fat," and any tam-

pering with these "brands" would be likely to precipitate a violent encounter between the men of the rival ships.

"I'm thinkin' 'twill snow afore night," Bill panted, as they ran along; and, indeed, it appeared that it would.

The advance soon had to be made with caution. The hunters were so near the pack that the whines of the white coats could be heard. Archie could make out not only the harps, but the blow-holes beside which they lay in family groups. At this point the men formed in twos and threes, and dispersed. In a few minutes more, they rushed upon the prey, striking right and left.

The ice was soon strewn with dead seals. It was harvest time for these impoverished Newfoundlanders. Lives of seals for lives of men and women! Bill o' Burnt Bay had ten "kids" at home, and he was merciless and mighty in destruction.

Archie and Billy came upon a family of four, lying at some distance from their blow-hole—two grown harps, a "jar," which is a one year old seal, and a ranger, which is three years old and spotted like a leopard. Billy attacked the

ranger without hesitation. Archie raised his gaff above the fluffy little jar, which was fanning itself with its flipper, and whining.

"I can't do it!" he exclaimed, lowering his club, and turning away, faint at heart; then "Look, Billy!" he cried, in half amused wonderment.

The old seals had wriggled off to the blowhole, moving upon their flippers, in short jumps, as fast as a man could walk. Apparently they had reached the hole at the same instant, which was not wide enough to admit them both. Neither would give way to the other. They were stuck fast, their heads below, their fat bodies above.

Their selfish haste was their undoing. Billy was not loath to take advantage of their predicament.

Thus, everywhere, the men were at work. There was no friction with the crew of the *Lucky Star;* the whole party worked amicably, and almost side by side. When they had dispersed the pack, the "sculping" knives were drawn, and the labour of skinning was vigorously prosecuted. The skins, with the blubber adhering, were piled in heaps of six or more, according to the strength of the men who were to "tow" them

to the edge of the field, where the ship was to return in the evening; and every "tow" was marked with an Armstrong and Son flag.

The *Lucky Star's* recall gun surprised the men before the work was finished. They looked up to find that the dusk was upon them, and that the snow was falling—falling ever more thickly, and drifting with the wind. The men of the *Lucky Star* stopped work, hurriedly saw to it that their heaps of pelt were all marked, and started on a run for the ship, for, on the ice fields, the command of the recall gun is never disregarded.

"There goes the *Dictator's* gun," shouted one of the men.

A second boom added force to the warning. The captain was evidently anxious to have his men safe out of the storm; the "fat" could be taken aboard in the morning. So Bill o' Burnt Bay, who was in tacit command of the party, called his men about him, and led the return. It was a mile over the ice to the *Dictator*, which lay waiting, with the second and third parties aboard. He was in haste; moreover, he had Sir Archibald Armstrong's son in his care: perhaps, that is why he did not stop to

count the *Dictator's* heaps of pelt before he started.

"Come, now, Tuttle, don't lag!" he shouted, ambitious to have his party return with no delay.

But Tuttle still lagged—or, rather, ran from heap to heap of pelt, as though to make sure that each was marked. He busied himself, indeed, until the party was well in advance—until, as he thought, there was no eye to see what he did under cover of the driving snow. Then he quickly snatched *Lucky Star* flags from half a dozen heaps of "fat," cast them away, and planted *Dictator* flags in their stead—a dishonourable duty which the house-flag of Armstrong & Son had never before been made to do.

Quite sure, now, that he had shot an arrow that would sorely wound Captain Hand and the firm of Armstrong & Son, Tuttle ran after his party. When he was yet some distance behind, he turned about, and saw a small figure following him. He stopped dead—and waited until that small figure came up.

"Topsail," he demanded, "what you been doin' back there?"

Billy was very much frightened; but he was a

truthful boy, and he now told the truth. "Been sculpin' an' pilin' me swiles, sir," he stammered.

"Has you been touchin' them flags?"

"N-n-no, sir. I didn't have no time. I was afeared I'd get lost in the snow."

Tuttle caught the boy by the shoulders, and stared fiercely into his eyes. "Did you see what I done?" he demanded.

Billy was strongly tempted to choose the easier way; but, as I have said, he was a truthful lad, and a brave lad, too. The temptation passed in a moment, and he fearlessly returned Tuttle's stare.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"If you tells Cap'n Hand what you saw," said Tuttle, tightening his grip, and bringing his face close to the lad's, "I'll ——"

He did not complete the threat. Billy Topsail's imagination, as he knew, would conceive the most terrible revenge.

"Yes, sir," Billy gasped, vacantly; for he was more frightened than he had ever before been in his short life.

That was all. They ran at full speed after their party, and soon joined it. Tuttle kept at Billy's side while they were getting aboard the

ship, kept at his side while supper was served in the forecastle, kept at his side through the short evening; kept at his side all the time, in a haunting, threatening way that frightened Billy as nothing else could, until the lad, tired out and utterly discouraged as to the purpose he had formed, turned in, no less to escape Tuttle, who had now grown hateful to him, than to rest.

"Oh," he thought, "if Archie had on'y come t' the fo'c's'le this night, I might 'a' told him; but now—I thinks—I'll be afeared, in the mornin'."

CHAPTER XXXIV

In Which Tim Tuttle's Shaft Flies Straight for the Mark. The Crews of the Dictator and Lucky Star Declare War, and Captain Hand is Threatened with the Shame of Dishonour, While Young Billy Topsail, Who Has the Solution of the Difficulty, is in the Hold of the Ship

TIM TUTTLE'S design against the honour of Captain Hand and of the firm of Armstrong & Son promised well. The following day broke fine; and, early in the morning, the crew of the *Dictator* was turned out to load the "fat" which had been left on the floe over night. About one hundred men were sent to the ice; the rest were kept on the ship to stow away the "tows" as they came aboard. Among the latter was young Billy Topsail, who was ordered to the hold the moment he appeared on deck.

The party under Bill o' Burnt Bay was first on the ground. Presently, the men from the *Lucky Star* arrived. For a time, pleasant words passed between the crews. Soon, however, a group of

Lucky Star hunters gathered out of hearing of the *Dictator's* crew. Their voices, which had been low at first, rose angrily, and to such a pitch that the attention of Bill o' Burnt Bay was attracted. He observed their suspicious glances, their wrathful faces, their threatening gestures; and he promptly surmised that trouble of a familiar kind was brewing.

It was evident that there was to be a dispute over the possession of certain of the "tows." The rights of that dispute Bill was not in a position to determine. So far as he knew—and he was bound to stand squarely upon his own knowledge—there had been no wrong-doing on the part of his men; and, being a man who never failed in his duty to the firm, he resolved that not an ounce of "fat" which then lay under a flag of Armstrong & Son should be yielded to the *Lucky Star* until a higher authority than he gave the word. Needless to say, that is precisely what Tuttle expected of him.

Moving quietly, lest he should provoke the dispute, Bill warned his men to be on the alert. And it was not long before the crew of the *Lucky Star*, with a stout fellow at their head, advanced threateningly.

"Look here, you, Bill o' Burnt Bay," shouted the leader, "some o' your men have been stealin' our tows."

"Oh, come, now, Johnny Tott," Bill replied, good-humouredly, "that ain't our way o' gettin' a cargo."

The men of the *Dictator* gathered behind Bill. Bill would have been better pleased had they gathered with less haste, had there been less of the battle-light in their eyes, had they held their gaffs less tightly—but all that, of course, was beyond his control; he could only make sure to have them there to defend the rights of the firm.

"You can't scare *me!*" Johnny Tott flashed, angered by what he understood to be a display of force, but still trying to keep his temper. "We left twenty-two tows here last night, an' we find sixteen this mornin'. Who took the odd six?"

Bill was bent on having the question referred to the captains of the ships. *They* might settle it as they would. As for him—knowing from experience how quickly such encounters might come, and how violent they might be—all he desired was peaceably to protect the interests of

his employers, and of the men, who had a percentage interest in every seal killed.

"I don't want t' scare you, Johnny Tott," he replied, quietly. "I thinks you've counted your flags wrong. Now, why can't we just——"

Then came an unfortunate interruption. It was a long, derisive cat-call from one of Bill's men—none other than Tim Tuttle. That was more than could be borne by men who were confident of their rights.

"Thieves!" half a dozen of the crew of the *Lucky Star* retorted. "A pack o' thieves!"

It was a critical moment. The *Dictator's* men, too, believed themselves to be in the right; and there was a limit to what they, too, could suffer. To be called thieves was perilously near that limit, already provoked, as they were, by what they thought a bold attempt to rob them of their seals.

Bill turned quickly on his own men. "Stand back!" he cried, knowing well that a rush impended.

"Thieves! Thieves!" taunted the crew of the *Lucky Star.*

"Keep your men quiet!" Bill roared to Johnny Tott. "There'll be trouble if you don't."

The *Lucky Star* men were outnumbered; but not so far outnumbered that their case would be hopeless in a hand-to-hand fight. Nevertheless, it was the part of wisdom for Johnny Tott, who was himself animated by the best motives, to keep them quiet. He faced them, berated them roundly, and threatened to "knock the first man down" who should dare to continue the disturbance. Thus encouraged, Bill o' Burnt Bay addressed his crew briefly and to the point.

"No nonsense, men!" he growled. "We wants no bloodshed here. The first man that passes me," he added, in such a way that not a man of them doubted he would make good his word, "may get hurt, an' badly hurt, afore he knows it."

It was no time for gentle dealing. Bill had strong, angry men to deal with; and the responsibility of keeping them from wronging themselves and their fellows sat heavily upon him. Confident, however, that he had them in check, he advanced to parley with Tott. All would doubtless have gone smoothly had there not been a designing man on Bill's side. That man was Tuttle, to whom the course of events was not pleasing. Perceiving, now, that an en-

counter was likely to be warded off, he determined to precipitate it.

"Who called me a thief?" he burst out.

Then he broke away from his fellows, and ran towards the crew of the *Lucky Star*, with his gaff upraised. But Bill o' Burnt Bay was quick as a flash to intercept him. He tripped Tuttle up with his gaff, fairly leaped upon the prostrate form, caught the man by the collar, dragged him back and flung him at the feet of the crew. And, meantime, the *Lucky Star* men, who had instantly prepared to meet Tuttle, laughed uproariously. That hearty laugh lightened the situation perceptibly.

"An' here comes Cap'n Black!" shouted one of the men.

Captain Hand of the *Dictator*, too, was on his way over the ice. Both skippers had observed the cessation of the work and the separation of the men into two hostile parties. Familiar as they were with such disputes, they needed no message to tell them that their presence was urgently needed on the floe. They came over the ice at full speed, at the same time trying to get at the merits of the quarrel from the men who ran to meet them; and, being fat sea-captains, both of

them, and altogether unused to hurried locomotion afoot, they were quite out of breath when they met.

The skipper of the *Lucky Star* was a florid, peppery little man, much given to standing upon his dignity.

"Cap'n Hand," he puffed, "this is—an outrage, sir! Is this the way——"

"'Scuse me—Cap'n B-Black—sir," the skipper of the *Dictator* panted, his little red eyes almost hidden by his bushy brows; "but—I'm wonderful s'prised—that——"

Captain Black drew a long breath, and proceeded more easily, but still with magnificent dignity. "*I'm* wonderful surprised t' know, sir," he said, "that *this* is the way Cap'n Hand makes a good v'y'ge of it every year. I never knew how before, sir."

"I'd have you t' know, sir," returned Captain Hand, bristling ominously, "that I 'lows no man t' call me a thief."

"I'd have you t' know, sir, that your men have stolen my fat."

"An' I'll have you t' know, sir, that that's t' be proved."

"Cap'n Hand, sir," declared Captain Black,

swelling like a pouter-pigeon the meanwhile, "you whole crew outnumbers mine nigh two t' one, or I'd load every pound o' fat on the ice on my ship. But I tells you now, sir, that I'll have the law o' you at St. John's. If you touch them six tows I'll have you sent t' coolie for a thief, sir, if there's an honest jury in the land! Mark my words, sir, I'll do it!"

The upshot of it all was, when both captains had cut a ridiculous figure for a considerable time (and had found it out), that the crews were withdrawn to the ships, ostensibly for dinner, but really that they might be kept apart while their blood was heated. A conference was appointed for three o'clock in the afternoon; and in the interval the captains were more fully and more accurately to inform themselves by examining their respective crews. This was a very sensible agreement. So far as it went, Captain Hand was content; but, being a wise and experienced man, he foresaw that an amicable settlement of the difficulty was extremely doubtful.

"I hopes, anyhow, that 'twill not come t' blows," he told Archie, as they trudged along, for his position made it impossible for him to confide in anybody else. "'Twill be a dreadful disgrace

if it comes t' blows. An' maybe 'twill be something worse."

When the men reached the *Dictator*, Billy Topsail was waiting on deck, keen as the rest of them to know what had happened on the ice. He had a wholesome conscience, and a reasonable courage; he had fully determined to do his duty, and was about to attract Archie Armstrong's attention —Archie was to be his first confidant—when Tuttle slipped quietly to his side, and laid a hand on his shoulder. Billy had no need to look up; he knew whose hand that was, and what the firm, increasing pressure meant.

"You better go t' the fo'c's'le, lad," Tuttle whispered in his ear.

CHAPTER XXXV

In Which the Issue is Determined

BILLY TOPSAIL went to the forecastle as he was bid. With Tuttle so near, he seemed not to have the will to carry out his purpose. He passed Archie on the way forward, even responded to his nod and merry greeting with a wistful smile; but said nothing, for he felt that Tuttle's cold gray eyes were fixed upon him. Archie marked that strange smile, and thought—it was just a fleeting thought—that Billy must be in trouble; he was about to stop, but put the solicitous question off—until another time.

Aboard the *Lucky Star*, Captain Black called Johnny Tott to his cabin. It was a serious moment for both, as both knew. The hunter realized that the captain would act upon his statement, and that there would be no return, once the course was taken. Moreover, he knew that he would have to take oath, and support that oath with evidence, in the court-room at St. John's.

"Now, John, I wants just the plainest kind o' truth," the captain began, for, shorn of his exaggerated dignity, he was a fair, honest-hearted man. "I've been friends with Cap'n Hand ever since we was young, an' I've liked him every hour o' that time, an' I've believed in him every minute; so I'm in no humour t' have a fallin' out with him. It'll go hard with the man who wrongfully leads me into *that*. Come, now, what's the *truth* o' all this?"

"The truth, sir," Johnny replied, slowly, "is this: We left twenty-two tows on the ice last night, every one with a Bryan & Company flag flyin' over it, an' we found but sixteen this mornin'. That's all I knows about it."

"Did you make the count alone?"

"No, sir. They was three others, which," most importantly, "I can pro-dooce any minute."

"All right, Johnny," said the captain, striking the table with his fist. "I believe you. You won't find Cap'n Black go back on his crew I'll have that fat, if I have t' fight for it!"

While this was passing, Captain Hand had summoned Bill o' Burnt Bay, Ebenezer Bowsprit and two or three other trustworthy men to

his cabin, and requested Archie Armstrong (the good captain seemed to consider the lad in some measure a representative of the firm) to hear the interview. One and all, for themselves and for the crew, they earnestly denied knowledge of any trickery. They regretted, they said, that the incident had occurred; but they believed that the seals were the property of the ship, and they hoped that the captain would not "see them robbed."

"But, Bill," said the captain, hopelessly, "you didn't *count* the tows?"

"No, sir," Bill answered, promptly, "I'm bound t' say I didn't. After your two recall guns, sir, we was in a hurry t' get aboard. 'Twas a fault, I knows, sir, but it can't be helped now. I don't *know* that anybody changed the flags. I hasn't any reason t' *think* so. So I *believe* that the fat's ours."

"Well, men," the captain concluded, "that's just my position. I *knows* nothin' t' the contrary; so I got t' believe that the fat's ours. You'll tell the crew that I'll stand by them. We'll take that fat, whatever they tries t' do, an' we'll let the courts decide afterwards. That's all."

There was fret and uncertainty for the captain after the men trooped out. He was an honest man, seeking the right, but not sure that he was right. It seemed to him that, whatever the outcome, his reputation and that of the firm would be tarnished. In a trial at law, the crew of the *Lucky Star* and the firm of Alexander Bryan & Company would appear as the aggrieved parties. Men would say—yes, men would even publicly take oath to it—that Captain Hand was a thief, and that the firm of Armstrong & Son abused its power and wealth in sustaining him. Not everybody would believe *that*, of course; but many would—and the odium of the charge would never disappear, let the verdict of the jury be what it might.

"B'y," he said to Archie, in great distress, "'tis a tryin' place t' be in. I wants t' wrong nobody. 'Twould wound me sore t' wrong Cap'n Black, who's always been my friend. But I got t' have that fat. A sealin' skipper that goes back on his crew is not fit for command. I *must* stand by the men. If I had an enemy, b'y," he added, "an' that enemy wanted t' ruin me, he couldn't choose a better——"

Captain Hand stopped dead and stared at the

table—stared, and gaped, until his appearance was altogether out of the common.

"What's the matter, cap'n?" asked Archie, alarmed.

At that moment, however, there was a knock at the door. Billy Topsail came in, pale and wide-eyed; but the sight of Archie seemed to compose him.

"I got t' tell you about Tim Tuttle," he began, hurriedly. "I hears there's goin' t' be a fight, an'—an'—I got t' tell you that I seed him change the flags on the tows."

"What!" shouted the captain, jumping out of his chair.

And so it all came out. At the end of the talk, Billy Topsail was assured by the smiling captain that he need not fear Tim Tuttle after a word or two had been spoken with him. Bill o' Burnt Bay was summoned, and corroborated Billy's statement that Tuttle was the last man to leave the tows. And Tuttle was the captain's enemy! Everybody knew it. The difficulties were thus all brushed away. The crew would accept the explanation and be content. Tuttle would be ridiculed until he was well punished for the trick that had so nearly succeeded. It was a good

ending to the affair—a far better outcome than any man aboard had dared hope for.

"Bill," said the captain, with an odd little smile, "send Tim Tuttle t' Cap'n Black, with my compliments; an' will Cap'n Black be so kind as t' accept my apology, and have a friendly cup o' tea with me immediate?"

Later, when Tuttle left the captain's cabin, after the "word or two" had been spoken, he was not grateful for the generous treatment he had received. He meditated further mischief; but before the second opportunity offered, there happened something which put animosity out of the hearts of all the crew.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It Appears That the Courage and Strength of the Son of a Colonial Knight are to be Tried. The Hunters are Caught in a Great Storm

THE *Lucky Star* and the *Dictator* parted company the next day—the former bound for the Labrador coast, the latter in a southerly direction to White Bay. For several days, the *Dictator* ran here and there among the great floes, attacking small herds; and at the end of a week she had ten thousand seals in her hold. But that cargo did not by any means content Captain Hand. Indeed, he began to fear the voyage would be little better than a failure. Nothing less than twenty thousands pelts would be a profitable "haul" for a vessel of the *Dictator's* tonnage to carry back to St. John's.

For that reason, perhaps, both the captain and the men were willing to take some risk, when, late one morning, a large herd was sighted on a floe near the coast in the southwest. The danger lay in the weather: it was an unpromising day—cold and dull, and threatening snow and

storm. For a time the captain hesitated ; but, at last, he determined to land his men in three parties, caution them to be watchful and quick, and himself try to keep the *Dictator* within easy reach of them all. It really did not appear to be necessary to waste the day merely because the sky was dark over the coast.

Bill o' Burnt Bay's party was landed first. Billy Topsail and Tim Tuttle were members of it; and, as usual, Archie Armstrong attached himself to it. As the *Dictator* steamed away to land the second crew, and, thence, still further away to land the third, Bill led his men on a trot for the pack, which lay about a mile from the water's edge.

"'Tis a queer day, this," Bill observed to the boys, who trotted in his wake.

"Sure, why?" asked Billy.

"Is it t' snow, or is it not? Can you answer me that? Sure, I most always can tell that little thing, but t'-day I can't."

"'Tis like snow," Billy replied, puzzled, "an' again 'tisn't. 'Tis queer, that!"

"I hopes the captain keeps the ship at hand," said Bill. "'Tis not t' my taste t' spend a night on the floe in a storm."

To be lost in a blizzard is a dreaded danger, and not at all an uncommon experience. Many crews, lost from the ship in a blinding storm, have been carried out to sea with the floe, and never heard of afterwards. Bill o' Burnt Bay lost his own father in that way, and himself had had two narrow escapes from the same fate. So he scanned the sky anxiously, not only as he ran along at the head of his sixty men, but from time to time through the day, until the excitement of the hunt put all else out of his head.

It was a profitable hunt. The men laboured diligently and rapidly. So intent on the work in hand were they that none observed the darkening sky and the gusts of wind that broke from behind the rocky coast. Thus, towards evening, when the work was over save the sculping and lashing, dusk caught them unaware Bill o' Burnt Bay looked up to find that the snow was flying, that it was black as ink in the northeast, and that the wind was blowing in long, angry gusts.

"Men," he cried, "did you ever see a sky like that?"

The men watched the heavy clouds in the northeast rise and swiftly spread.



"LASH YOUR TOWS, B'YS," SAID BILL.
"LEAVE THE REST GO."

"Sure, it looks bad," muttered one.

"Make haste with the sculpin'," Bill ordered. "They's wonderful heavy weather comin' up. I mind me a time when a blizzard come out of a sky like that."

The dusk grew deeper, the snow fell thicker, the wind rose; and all this Bill observed while he worked. Groups of men lashed their tows and started off for the edge of the floe where the steamer was to return for them.

"Lash your tows, b'ys," shouted Bill, to the rest of the men. "Leave the rest go. 'Tis too late t' sculp any more."

There was some complaint; but Bill silenced the growlers with a sharp word or two. The whole party set off in a straggling line, dragging their tows; it was Bill who brought up the rear, for he wanted to make sure that his company would come entire to the landing-place. Strong, stinging blasts of wind were then sweeping out of the northeast, and the snow was fast narrowing the view.

"Faster, b'ys!" cried Bill. "The storm's comin' wonderful quick."

The storm came faster than, with all his experience, Bill o' Burnt Bay had before believed

possible. When he had given the order to abandon the unskinned seals, he thought that there was time and to spare; but, now, with less than half the distance to the landing-place covered, the men were already staggering, the wind was blowing a gale, and the blinding snow almost hid the flags at the water's edge. When he realized this, and that the ship was not yet in sight, "Drop everything, an' run for it!" was the order he sent up the line.

"Archie, b'y," he then shouted, catching the lad by the arm and drawing him nearer, "we got t' run for the landing-place. Stick close t' me. When you're done out, I'll carry you. Is you afraid, b'y?"

Archie looked up, but did not deign to reply to the humiliating question.

"All right, lad," said Bill, understanding. "Is you ready?"

Archie knew that his strength and courage were to be tried. He was tired, and cold, and almost hopeless; but, then and there, he resolved to prove his blood and breeding—to prove to these men, who had been unfailingly kind to him, but yet had naturally looked with good-natured contempt upon his fine clothes and white

hands, that fortitude was not incompatible with a neat cravat and nice manners. Beyond all that, however, it was his aim to prove that Sir Archibald Armstrong's son was the son of his own father.

"Lead on, Bill," he said.

"Good lad!" Bill muttered.

Archie bent to the blast.

CHAPTER XXXVII

In Which the Men are Lost, the Dictator is Nipped and Captain Hand Sobs, "Poor Sir Archibald!"

WHEN the last party of hunters had been landed from the *Dictator*, the ship was taken off the ice field; and there she hung, in idleness, awaiting the end of the hunt. It was then long past noon. The darkening sky in the northeast promised storm and an early night more surely than ever. It fretted the captain. He was accountable to the women and children of Green Bay for the lives of the men; so he kept to the deck, with an eye on the weather: and while the gloom deepened and spread, a storm of anxiety gathered in his heart —and, at last, broke in action.

"Call the watch, Mr. Ackell!" he cried, sharply. "We'll wait no longer."

He ran to the bridge, signalled "Stand by!" to the engine-room, and ordered the firing of the recall gun. The men of the last party were

within ear of the report. It brought all work on the ice to a close. The men waited only to pile the dead seals in heaps and mark possession with flags.

"Again, mate!" shouted the captain. "They're long about comin', it seems t' me."

A second discharge brought the men on a run to the edge of the ice. It was evident that some danger threatened. They ran at full speed, crowded aboard the waiting boats, and were embarked as quickly as might be. Then the ship steamed off to the second field, five miles distant, to pick up the second party. When she came within hearing distance, three signal guns were fired, with the result that, when she came to, the men were waiting for the boats.

It was a run of six miles to the field upon which the first party had been landed—part of the way in and out among the pans. The storm had now taken form and was advancing swiftly, and the fields in the northeast were hidden in a spreading darkness. The wind had risen to half a gale, and it was beginning to snow. A run of six miles! The captain's heart sank. When he looked at the black clouds rising from behind the coast, he doubted that the *Dictator* could do it in

time. An appalling fortune seemed to be descending on the men on the ice.

"But we may make it, mate," said the captain, "if ——"

"Ay, sir?"

"If they's no ice comin' with the gale."

The ship had been riding the open sea, skirting the floe. Now she came to the mouth of a broad lane, which wound through the fields. It was the course; along that lane, at all hazards, she must thread her way. The danger was extreme. The wind, blowing a gale, might force the great fields together. Or, if ice came with the wind, the lanes might be choked up. In either event, what chance would there be for the men? In the first event, which was almost inevitable, what chance would there be for the *Dictator* herself?

"Cap'n Hand, sir," the mate began, nervously, "is you goin'——"

The captain looked up in amazement when the mate stammered and stopped. "Well, sir?" he said.

"Is you goin' inside the ice, sir?"

"Is I goin' WHAT?" roared the captain, turning upon him. "Is I goin' WHAT, sir?"

It was sufficient. The captain *was* going among the fields. The mate needed no plainer answer to his question.

"Beg pardon, sir," he muttered meekly. "I thought you was."

"Huh!" growled the captain.

When the ship passed into the lane, the storm burst overhead. The scunner in the foretop was near blinded by the driven snow. His voice was swept hither and thither by the wind. Directions came to the bridge in broken sentences. The captain dared not longer drive the vessel at full speed.

"Half speed!" he signalled.

The ship crept along. For half an hour, while the night drew on, not a word was spoken, save the captain's quiet "Port!" and "Starboard!" into the wheelhouse tube. Then the mate heard the old man mutter:

"Poor b'y! Poor Sir Archibald!"

No other reference was made to the boy. In the captain's mind, thereafter, for all the mate knew, young Archibald Armstrong, the owner's son, was merely one of a crew of sixty men, lost on the floe.

"Ice ahead!" screamed the lookout in the bow.

The ship was brought to a stop. The lane she had been following had closed before her. The mate went forward.

"Heavy ice, sir," he reported.

Broken ice, then, had come down with the wind. It had been carried into the channels, choking them.

"Does you see water beyond, b'y?" the captain shouted.

"'Tis too thick t' tell, sir."

The captain signalled "Go ahead!" The chance must be taken. To be caught between two fields in a great storm was a fearful situation. So the ship pushed into the ice, moving at a snail's pace, labouring hard, and complaining of the pressure upon her ribs. Soon she made no progress whatever. The screw was turning noisily; the vessel throbbed with the labour of the engines; but she was at a standstill.

"Stuck, sir!" exclaimed the mate.

"Ay, mate," the captain said, blankly, "stuck."

The ship struggled bravely to force her way on; but the ice, wedged all about her, was too heavy.

"God help the men!" said the captain, as he

signalled for the stopping of the engines. "We're stuck!"

"An' God help us," the mate added, in the same spirit, "if the fields come together!"

Conceive the situation of the *Dictator*. She lay between two of many vast, shifting fields, all of immeasurable mass. The captain had deliberately subjected her to the chances in an effort to rescue the men for whom he was accountable to the women and children of Green Bay. She was caught; and if the wind should drive the fields together, her case would be desperate, indeed. The slow, mighty pressure exerted by such masses is irresistible. The ship would either be crushed to splinters, or—a slender chance—she would be lifted out of danger for the time.

Had there been no broken ice about her, destruction would have been inevitable. Her hope now lay in that ice; for, with the narrowing of the space in which it floated, it would in part be forced deep into the water, and in part be crowded out of it. If it should get under the ship's bottom, it would exert an increasing upward pressure; and that pressure might be strong enough to lift the vessel clear of the fields. The

captain had known of such cases; but now he smiled when he called them to mind.

"Take a week's rations an' four boats t' the ice, mate," he directed, "an' be quick about it. We'll sure have t' leave the ship."

While the mate went about this work, the captain paced the bridge, regardless of the cold and storm. It was dark, the wind was bitter and strong, the snow was driving past; but still he paced the bridge, now and then turning towards the darkness of that place, far off on the floe, where his men, and the young charge he had been given, were lost. The women of Green Bay would not forgive him for lives lost thus; of that he was sure. And the lad—that tender lad ——

"Poor little b'y!" he thought. "Poor Sir Archibald!"

For relief from this torturing thought, he went among the men. He found most of them gathered in groups, gravely discussing the situation of the ship. In the forecastle, some were holding a "prayer-meeting"; the skipper paused to listen to the singing and to the solemn words that followed it. Here and there, as he went along, he spoke an encouraging word; here and there dropped a word of advice, as, "Timothy,

b'y, you got too much on your back; 'tis not wise t' load yourself down when you takes t' the ice," and the like; here and there, in a smile or a glance, he found the comforting assurance that the men knew he had tried to do his duty.

"Cap'n John Hand," he thought, when he returned to the bridge, "you hasn't got a coward aboard!"

The mate came up to report. "We've the boats on the ice, sir," he said, "an' I've warned the crew t' make ready."

"Very well, Mr. Ackell; they's nothin' more t' be done."

"Hark, sir!"

The ice about the ship seemed to be stirring. Beyond—from far off in the distance to windward—the noise of grinding, breaking ice-pans could be heard. There was no mistaking the warning. The moment of peril was at hand.

"The fields is comin' together, sir."

"Call the crew, Mr. Ackell," said the captain, quietly.

The men gathered on deck. They were silent while they waited. The only sounds came from

the ice—and from overhead, where the wind was screaming through the rigging.

"'Tis comin', sir," said the mate.

"Ay."

"God help us!"

"'Twill soon be over, Mr. Ackell," observed the captain.

He awaited the event with a calm spirit.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

And Last: In Which Wind and Snow and Cold Have Their Way and Death Lands on the Floe. Billy Topsail Gives Himself to a Gust of Wind, and Archie Armstrong Finds Peril and Hardship Stern Teachers. Concerning, also, a New Sloop, a Fore-an'-After and a Tailor's Lay-Figure

BILL o' Burnt Bay did not lead a race for the landing place. When he looked up, a thick curtain of snow hid the flags. It was then apparent to him that he and his men must pass the night on the ice. In a blizzard of such force and blinding density, no help could reach them from the ship, even if she managed to reach the place where the men were to be taken aboard.

Nothing was visible but the space immediately roundabout; and the wind had risen to such terrific strength that sound could make small way against it. Thus, neither lights nor signal guns could be perceived—not though the ship should beat her way to within one hundred yards of where the group stood huddled. There was nothing for it but to seek the shelter of an ice

hummock, and there await the passing of the storm.

"B'ys," he said to the few men who had gathered about him, and he shouted at the top of his voice, for the wind whisked low-spoken words away, "they's a hummock somewheres handy. Leave us get t' the lee of it."

"No, no!" several men exclaimed. "Leave us get on t' the rest o' the crew. 'Tis no use stayin' here."

"The path is lost, men," Bill cried. "You'll lose your way—you'll lose your lives!"

But they would not listen. They hurried forward, and were soon swallowed up by the night and snow. Bill o' Burnt Bay was left alone with Billy and Archie and a man named Osmond, who was a dull, heavy fellow.

"They's a hummock within a hundred yards o' here," Bill shouted. "I marked it afore the snow got thick. We must find it. 'Tis ——"

"'Tis t' the left; 'tis over there," said Billy, pointing to the left. "I marked it well."

"Ay 'tis somewheres t' the left. Our only chance is t' find it. Now, listen well t' what I says. We must spread out. I'll start off. Archie, you follow me; keep sight o' me—keep just sight

o' me, an' no more; but don't lose me, b'y, for your life. Osmond, you'll follow the b'y; an' be sure you watch him well. Billy, b'y, you'll follow Osmond. When we gets in line, we'll face t' the left an' go for'ard. The first t' see the hummock will signal the next man, an' he'll pass the word."

The three nodded their heads to signify their understanding of these directions.

"Osmond, don't lose sight o' this b'y," said Bill, impressively, placing his hand on Archie's shoulder. "D'you mind? Men," he went on, "if one loses sight o' the others, 'tis all up with us. Leave your pelt go. I'll take mine."

Shelter from that frosty wind was imperative in Archie's case. He made no complaint, for it was not in his nature to complain; but, strong to endure as he was, and stout as his spirit was, the cold, striking through the fur and wool about him, was having its inevitable effect.

When Bill moved off, dragging his burden of pelt, the boy calmly waited until the stalwart figure had been reduced to an outline; then, with heavy steps, but fixed purpose to acquit himself like a man, he followed, keeping his distance. Osmond came next. Young Billy had

the exposed position—a station of honour in which he exulted—at the other end of the line.

Bill gave the signal, which was passed along by Archie to Osmond and by him to Billy, and they faced about and moved forward in the direction in which the hummock lay.

Archie searched the gloom for the gray shape of the hummock. It was a shelter—a mere relief. But how despairingly he searched for a sight of that formless heap of ice! Soon he began to stumble painfully. Once he lost sight of Bill o' Burnt Bay. Then he faltered, fell and could not rise. It was the watchful Bill who picked him up.

"What's this, b'y?" Bill asked, his voice shaking.

"I fell down," Archie answered, sharply. "That's all."

"I'll carry you, b'y," Bill began. "I'll carry you, if——"

Archie roughly pushed the man away. Then he stumbled forward, keeping his head up.

At that moment, Osmond, who was like a shadow to the right, gave the signal. So Bill knew that Billy, whom he could not see, had chanced upon the hummock. He caught Archie

up in his arms, against the boy's protests and struggles, and ran with him to Osmond, and thence to Billy, all the time dragging his "tow."

When they reached the lee of the ice, Archie lay quietly in Bill's arms. He was about to fall asleep, as Bill perceived.

"Unlash the tow," Bill said, quickly, to Osmond, "an' start a fire."

With the help of Billy, Osmond took a pelt from the pack, and spread it on the ice.

"They's no wood," he said, stupidly

"Take the cross-bar o' the tow line, dunderhead!" cried Billy. "Here! Leave me do it."

While Billy released the slender bar of wood from the end of the line, stuck it in the blubber and prepared to set fire to it, Bill was dealing with Archie's drowsiness. He shook the lad with all his strength, slapped him, shook him again, ran him hither and thither, and, at last, roused him to a sense of peril. The boy fought desperately to restore his circulation.

"'Tis ready t' light," Billy said to Bill.

"Leave me do it," Bill answered. "Keep movin', b'y," he cautioned Archie. "Don't you give up."

Give up? Not he! And Archie said so—

mumbled it scornfully to Bill, and repeated it again and again to himself, until he was sick of the monotony of the words, but could not stop repeating them.

Neither Osmond nor Billy had matches, but Bill had a box in his waistcoat pocket. He shielded the contents from the wind and snow while he took one match out. Then he closed the box and handed it to Osmond to hold. It was well that he did not return it to his own pocket.

Archie was stumbling back and forth over the twenty yards of sheltered space. He had a great, shadowy realization of two duties: he must keep in motion, and he must keep out of the wind. All else had passed from his consciousness. At every turn, however, he unwittingly ventured further past the end of the hummock.

Twice the wind, the full force of which he could not resist, almost caught him. Then came a time when he had to summon his whole strength to tear himself from its clutch. He told himself he must not again pass beyond the lee of the ice. But, before he returned to that point, he had forgotten the danger.

A mighty gust laid hold on him, carried him off his feet, and swept him far out into the darkness.[1] It chanced that Billy Topsail, who had kept an eye on Archie, caught sight of him as he fell.

"Archie!" the boy screamed.

"Archie?" cried Bill, looking up. "What——"

Archie had even then been carried out of sight. Billy leaped to his feet and followed. He gave himself to the same gust of wind, and, with difficulty keeping himself upright, was carried along with it. Bill grasped the situation in a flash. He, too, leaped up, and ran into the storm.

"Archie, b'y!" he cried. "Where is you? Oh, where is you, lad?" It was the first time in many years that heart's agony had wrung a cry from old Bill o' Burnt Bay.

Billy Topsail was carried swiftly along by the wind. It was clear to him that, should he diverge from the path of the gust, not only would he be unable to find the lost boy, but he himself

[1] It is related by the survivors of the steamship *Greenland* disaster, of some years ago, in which sixty lives were lost, that one man was in this way carried half a mile over the ice. When he was found, he had gone mad.

would be in hopeless case. The wind swept him close upon Archie's track, but, as its force wasted, ever more slowly. He soon tripped over an obstruction, and plunged forward on his face. He recovered, and crawled back. There he came upon Archie, lying in a heap, half covered by a drift of snow.

"B'y," Billy shouted, "is you dead?"

Archie opened his eyes. Billy Topsail looked close, but could see no light of intelligence in them. He shook the boy violently.

"Wake up!" he cried. "Wake up!"

"What?" Archie responded, faintly.

Billy lifted him to his feet, but there was no strength in the lad's legs; he was limp as a drunken man. But this exertion restored Billy Topsail; he felt his own strength returning—a strength which the arduous toil of the coast had mightily developed.

"Stand up, b'y!" he shouted in Archie's ear. "Put your arm on my shoulder. I'll help you along."

"No," Archie muttered. But despite this protest he was lifted up; then he said: "Give me your hand. I'm all right."

Billy wasted no words. He locked his arms

about Archie's middle, lifted him, and staggered forward against the wind.

The wind had fallen somewhat, and he made some progress. But the burden was heavy, and twice he fell. Then he heard Bill o' Burnt Bay's voice, and he shouted a response, but the wind carried the words away. He could hear Bill, who was to windward, but Bill could not hear him. So when the call came again, he marked the location and staggered in that direction.

"Oh, Billy! Oh, Archie!"

The voice was nearer—and to the left. Billy Topsail changed his course. The next cry came from the right again. Was the wind deceiving him? Or was Bill changing his place? Then came a ringing cry near at hand.

"Bill!" screamed Billy Topsail.

"Here! Where is you?"

Bill's great body emerged from the darkness. He cried out joyfully as he rushed forward, took Archie from Billy's arms, and slung him over his shoulder.

"Praise God!" he muttered tremulously, when he felt life stirring in the small body.

He put his face close to Billy Topsail's and looked steadily into the boy's eyes for an instant;

and no words were needed to say what he meant.

But where was the hummock? Bill looked about.

"'Tis there," said Billy, pointing ahead.

Bill shook his head. His homing instinct, to which he had trusted his life in many a fog and night, told him otherwise. Reason entered into his decision not at all; he merely waited until he was persuaded that his face was turned in the right direction. Then he started off unhesitatingly. He had found the harbour entrance thus in many a thick summer night when his fishing punt rode a trackless sea.

"Take hold o' me jacket, b'y," he said to Billy. "Mind you stick close by me."

For some time they wandered without seeing any sign of the hummock. Bill's heart sank lower and lower; for he knew that if they did not soon find shelter, Archie would die in his arms. At last Bill caught sight of a light—a dull, glowing light.

"Is that a fire?" he asked.

"'Tis the hummock!" Billy cried. "'Tis Osmond with the fire goin'. 'Tis he! 'Tis he!"

"We're saved," said Bill.

Once in the lee of the hummock, they roused



"WE'RE SAVED!" SAID BILL.

Archie from his stupor, and warmed him over the fire, which Osmond, after many failures, had succeeded in lighting. They broke the cross-piece of the tow line in two, took another pelt from the pack, and made two fires. The wood was like the wick in a candle; it blazed in the blubber, and was not consumed. Between the fires they huddled together, with Archie in the middle. Their bodies warmed the lad, and he slumbered snugly, quietly, through the night. Billy Topsail, more sturdy of body, if not of spirit, kept awake, and had a part in the talk with which each tried to cheer the others through the fearful, dragging hours.

"'Tis the day," said Bill, at last, pointing to the east.

The wind abated as the dawn advanced, and the snow ceased to fall. Light crept over the field, and men appeared from behind clumpers of ice. Group signalled to group. All made their way to the place where the ship had landed them, a dozen men were already clustered—a gaunt, haggard, frost-bitten crowd. The terrors of the night still oppressed them, and, through weeks, would haunt their dreams.

They counted their number. Fifty-nine living

men were there ; and there was one dead body—that of Tim Tuttle of Raggles Island, who had strayed away from his fellows and been lost. And thus they awaited the full break of day, while eyes were strained into the departing night. Where was the ship? Had she survived? These were the questions they asked one another.

"What's that patch o' black?" Bill o' Burnt Bay asked. "Due west, lads—a mile or more off?"

"Sure, it looks like the ship," some of the men agreed.

As the light increased, the storm passed on. A burst of sunshine at last revealed the *Dictator*, lying on the ice, listed far to port. The broken ice in which she had been caught, they learned afterwards, had been forced under her, and she had been lifted out of danger when the fields that nipped her came together.

When it is said that old Captain Hand welcomed his crew with open arms, and embraced Archie—the meanwhile searching through all his pockets for a handkerckief, which he could not find—there remains little to be told. He was more haggard than the rescued men. What

depths his brave spirit sounded on that long night are not to be described.

"Well, b'y," was what he said to Archie, "you're back, is you?"

"Safe and sound, cap'n," the boy replied, wearily, "and hungry."

"Send the cook for'ard with the scoff!" roared the captain.

Before noon, all the men were safe aboard, and the ice was breaking up. When the *Dictator* settled softly into the water, at the parting of the fields, the pelt was stowed away. She had no difficulty in making the open sea; and thence she set forth in search of other floes and other seal packs.

The *Dictator* made Long Tom Harbour without mishap. There it was made known that the name of Billy Topsail of Ruddy Cove was "on the books," and not a man grumbled because the lad was to share with the rest. There, too, old John Roth, to whom two "white coats" had been promised, claimed the gift of Archie, and was not disappointed. And there Archie said good-bye to Billy for the time.

"I'll see you this summer," he said. "Don't

forget, Billy. I'll spend a week of vacation time with you at Ruddy Cove."

"No," Billy replied. "You'll spend it at New Bay. Sure, me name is on the books, an' I'm goin' after lobsters with me own skiff in July."

"I'll go with you, if you'll take me," said Archie. "And I can never, never forget that you——"

"Sure," Billy Topsail interrupted, flushing, "you'll go with me t' New Bay. An' times we'll have of it!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, b'y!"

And so they parted on terms of perfect equality.

That summer, Billy Topsail went to New Bay. But it was not in a skiff; it was in a swift little sloop, especially made to be sailed by a crew of one. It came North, mysteriously, from St. John's, to the wonder of all Green Bay; and its name was *Rescue*. And a letter came North for Bill o' Burnt Bay: which, when he read it, stirred him to the profoundest depth of his rugged old heart, for he roared in a most unmannerly fashion that he'd "be busted if he'd

take a thing for standin' by such a lad!" In reply to a second letter, however, Bill said he would "be willin' t' take it on credit, if he'd be 'lowed t' pay for it as he could." So that is how Bill o' Burnt Bay came to sail to the Labrador in his own fore-and-after, when the fish were running.

And, once, Sir Archibald Armstrong turned to his son. "Well, my boy," he said, slowly, "I've been wanting to ask you a question. What do you think of your shipmates?"

"I think they're heroes, every one!" Archie answered.

"Do you think you now know the difference between a man and a tailor's lay-figure?"

"Oh, sir," Archie laughed, "I'll never forget *that!*"

Billy Topsail had never needed to learn.

THE END